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BY R. H. SHERARD
AUTHOR OF "ROGUES"



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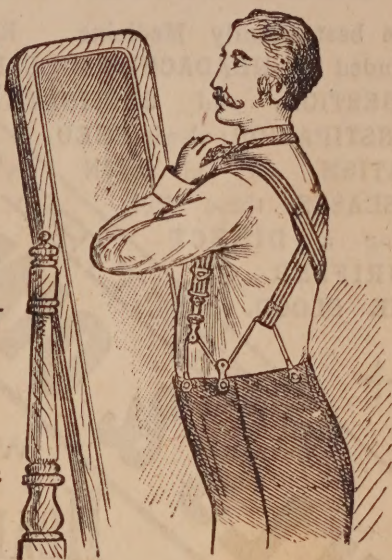
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AGATHA'S QUEST.

BY

R. H. SHERARD,

AUTHOR OF "A BARTERED HONOUR," "THE AMERICAN MARQUIS,"
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LETTER TO THE AUTHOR from the CELEBRATED FRENCH NOVELIST,
JULES VERNE.

Dear Mr. Sherrard,—You are about to bring out a new novel, which brings on to the stage “the woman-reporter.” It is a type which is almost new for us, although already greatly used in the service of American journalism.

I believe that your novel is destined to meet with great success, and I should blame myself were I to reveal the principal scenes which throw your heroine into such striking relief. So all that I will do in this letter is to draw attention to certain features of American journalism.

In Europe, and especially in France, people who occupy themselves with the duties of the police are always more or less despised. This is not so in America, where this occupation is part of the attributions of every reporter who knows his business, and it would appear of every woman reporter also. Now, granted that reporting has become the base of all modern journalism, who shall be astonished at the duties that it imposes on its agent? Does not the greedy curiosity of the reader exact continuous information every day, every hour?

From that to sending women out into the curious battlefield of a reporter's life there was only a step to be taken, and certain it is that they have shown themselves possessed of more finesse and even of more courage than their brothers.

Have I not been told that a young American girl pretending to be mad, had herself shut up in a lunatic asylum, so as to be able to expose its abuses in her newspaper?

Allow me to add, dear sir, that reporting has now given birth to a publication which most happily completes it. Look at the “New York World.” It adds the sketch to the text, and takes your attention not only by the mind but also by the eye; together with the story it gives the scene and the portraits of the persons talked about. Is it not that that it did for Miss Nellie Bly, when it showed every day of the seventy-two days of her extraordinary journey round the world? Yes, sketches and text, men and women reporters, the whole future of the newspaper is there.

To return again to “Agatha's Quest,” I must say, dear sir, that you have in your novel given a very bold study of this curious type of American girl. And, if all the readers who follow your interesting correspondences to the “New York World” only remain faithful to you, as I do not doubt they will, I am sure that your new work will obtain a fine success, which will rejoice me first of all.

Yours very cordially,

Amiens,

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Jules Verne

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AGATHA'S QUEST.

CHAPTER I.

OFF TO PARIS.

"MR. SCHNEIDER in?" asked an ill-dressed man, stepping into the London office of *The New York Informer* one afternoon in January, 1885.

The office-boy looked up from his paper with a grin, scanned the visitor carefully, and shook his head.

"Quite certain?" asked the stranger, walking towards the inner-office, which was partitioned off from the general room.

"Quite certain," said the office-boy. "It's no use your going in there. Besides, I can't allow it."

"Ah. But perhaps you'll tell me when Mr. Schneider is likely to be back. I wish to see him."

"If it's for work, it's no use; we are full up. If it's for a bill, you must send it by post. If it's a news item, you can give it to me. If it's for a loan, you have made a mistake in the number. The pawnshop is round the corner."

The stranger smiled. "But you haven't answered my question yet," he insisted. "When's Mr. Schneider likely to be back?"

"Oh, I don't know. He's breakfasting at Marlborough House. You know their hours better than I do."

"Been in this office long?" continued the gentleman, sitting down and eyeing the lad with an amused expression.

"Yes, longer than I care for."

"Ah. How's that?"

"Well, I've been here since three o'clock this morning, and I am beginning to want my dinner."

"Well, run out and get it, my lad. You look as if you wanted it."

"And leave the office to look after itself, I suppose. Yes, that would do famously, wouldn't it. That shows what you know about newspaper business."

"I'll look after the office in your absence."

"You're very kind; but as I happen to know nothing about you, I can't delegate my powers to you in that way. Besides, there's a story lying on Mr. Schneider's desk ready to cable, which it really might be worth your while to get a sight of."

"Good boy. Good boy," said the stranger, approvingly. Then, after a pause, he asked, "Wasn't Mr. Schneider expecting Mr. Mundy's call to-day?"

"Yes, I believe so. Mr. Mundy is to be here at three."

"Well, Mr. Mundy is here at two," said the visitor, glancing at the clock.

"You," cried the office-boy in consternation. "You — you are the boss?"

"Yes, I'm Mr. John Mundy. There, now, don't look so frightened. You're all right. Don't spoil my impression of you by making excuses, but answer the question I put you at first."

"He said he'd be here about two," said the lad. "He's at lunch in the Strand."

"Well, I'll wait for him. What's your name?"

"Tom."

"Then, Tom, catch hold of this dollar, and go and get your dinner."

"Excuse me," said the office-boy, hesitatingly. "You see I don't know you, all the same."

Just then, Mr. Schneider returned, and set Tom's doubts at rest, by the respectful greeting he gave to the visitor.

The appearance of the London correspondent-in-chief of the *Informer* presented a striking contrast to that of his employer, the millionaire editor and proprietor, whose modest demeanour and dress had deceived the experienced eye of the world-wise office boy himself.

"Smart boy that Tom," said John Mundy, after they had taken seat in the inner office. "We ought to be able to make something out of him." Then, dismissing the subject, he took up some sheets of MS. which were lying on the table, and said, "This, I suppose, is the good story he spoke about. What is it, Mr. Schneider?"

"Oh, about the Earl of Brookshire. Wilson, you know."

"Wilson? Ah, the mammoth landowner."

"Yes, the Englishman who owns the biggest slice of U.S.A. territory of any foreigner. He has just been raised to the peerage; at least, the announcement is to be gazetted Thursday."

"And do you make 3,000 words out of that?" cried the editor, turning over the written slips. "Expensive work, sir, by cable."

"Well, you see, Wilson's well known in the States," pleaded the correspondent. "Besides, there's a capital story attaching to him, which is of special interest now that the Queen has conferred this distinction upon him. He has a son, or had a son."

"Didn't know he was married," said the editor.

"Nobody did. He's a widower, and is generally supposed to be childless. He had one son, though, by his wife, and this son left him, years ago, after a violent quarrel, and has never been heard of since. I have the whole story from a person, a Mrs. Hackett, who was in Wilson's service at the time, eleven years ago. That was before Wilson's fortune was what it is now, and before he was anybody. During all these eleven years the son has given no sign of life, nor has the father taken any steps to find him out. The quarrel was a terrible one, as you can see if you will read the story. Now one point is that the son, the heir to the title and this immense fortune, is known to be in the States, where he doubtless occupies some very humble position."

"Ah, I see," said the editor; "make a good head-line, 'The Missing Heir,' &c. Still, 3,000 words at a shilling the word is a good deal, is it not? However, I will look at the story and pass on it before night. There's another thing I want to talk to you about," he continued, "and that shall be the last bit of business I shall do this trip. It's a trifling matter, it's true, but it struck me as a good thing. For try as I will, and as the doctor orders me, I can't keep the paper out of my head. Well, then, I have been thinking that we have been giving too much sensational stuff in the *Informer* of late."

"*Can* one give too much sensational stuff?" asked the correspondent.

"Perhaps not. But what I mean is we don't vary our menu quite enough. All politics, fires, and crimes, and next to nothing about art and letters."

"Oh, art and letters!" cried the correspondent contemptuously.

"Yes, yes. There's a large public, Mr. Schneider, for

that stuff, and a little of it, occasionally, gives a paper a tone. Well, what I want, in the first place, is to have the leading American artists in London, Paris, and Florence written up: their studies, their work, the pictures they are preparing for the Spring Exhibitions, and so on. As Paris is the most important art centre, we will begin with Paris. You've got to find me a man to send over for the job."

"What are the requirements?"

"Well, he must know something about Paris, and be able to write intelligently about pictures."

"There's Oaklands," muttered Schneider, "who does our Paris work whenever there is anything to be done, but he's gone to Berlin. I don't know whom to suggest."

"I had thought of Agatha Ouseley," remarked Mr. Mundy. "She knows Paris and writes well."

"We couldn't spare her," said Schneider. "You know she does the London society gossip and fashions. Besides, I don't think she'd accept to go. Her husband's always ailing, and then she has her little girl to look after."

"No, perhaps it would be as well to keep her here, especially as I may want her for something else. She's a clever woman—a clever woman. You can't imagine how her work takes in New York. I am waiting to give her a good chance—to put her on a big thing."

"There's that fellow Forster," suggested Schneider.

"Who's that? Forster? Forster?"

"He is an Englishman who has done several jobs for me, and who works conscientiously and well. He has a good style in certain ways. I know he has lived in Paris some years. He would be glad of the commission, as he is considerably out at elbows just now. He was in here only yesterday asking for work."

"Well, I think I had better see him. Do you think you could find him to-day? I would like to get this fixed up at once."

"You can see him in half-an-hour, if he's at home. He lives quite close, in Salisbury Street. I can send for him at once, if you like."

"Yes, do. I'll talk to him here and now."

"Or, as Tom's out, I'll walk round myself and fetch him."

"Go ahead. I'll look over this story whilst you're gone," said the editor, taking up a blue pencil and drawing the MS. towards him.

He had barely had time to read it through when Schneider returned, accompanied by a man, whom he introduced to the chief as Robert Forster, adding that he had happened to meet him in the Strand.

"Has Mr. Schneider told you what I want to see you about?" asked the editor, motioning to Forster to sit down.

"No, sir. He merely mentioned that Mr. Mundy wanted to speak to me."

"Mr. Schneider thinks you could do some work I require doing, and I want to have your ideas on the subject. You are wanting a job?"

"Yes, indeed. I should be very glad of one, especially in service of the *Informer*."

"You know Paris?"

"Yes, well. I lived there three years. I left it five years ago."

"Do you speak French?"

"Oh, yes, perfectly."

"And know something about pictures? Enough to describe them intelligibly?"

"Yes, I think so. I used to paint myself, at one time."

"Very good. Well then, would you be ready to go on a journalistic commission to Paris?"

Forster started noticeably at this question. He had been looking down at the table whilst the editor was speaking, and when he raised his head to reply it was seen that his face was very pale.

"Have you any reason for not wishing to go to Paris?" asked the editor, noticing his trouble.

"I—I—I," stammered Forster, turning a deep red.

"No, sir, no."

"You seemed embarrassed by my question."

"No, indeed. I was pleased, that is all, very pleased."

"Good. Then listen to me."

The editor then proceeded to describe the work which he wanted doing, giving the minutest instructions as to how it was to be done, the time that it was to be done in, the amount of matter to be collected, and the expenses that might be incurred in collecting it.

"Besides these," he concluded, "you will be paid ten dollars a column for all you send in. If you do well, I'll send you on to Florence on a similar assignment. I trust you will merit the good recommendation Mr. Schneider gave me in speaking about you. Do you think you can do the work properly?"

"Yes, sir," answered Forster, who had completely regained his composure, "I think so. It's just in sympathy with my tastes."

"And do the terms suit you?"

"Yes. I presume you will allow me some advance on my expenses. I have very little money at my disposal."

Mundy glanced at Schneider, who nodded approvingly.

"Well," said the editor, "we'll advance you ten pounds."

When will you be ready to go? I'd like the work done as soon as possible. We are at the end of January now, and so all the artists will have their *salon* or academy pictures in preparation. It would be newsy to get a description of these in advance."

"I can go to-night, if you wish. There is nothing to keep me in London, and I would like to get about the work as soon as possible."

"Very good. Then you can go now and make your preparations, and call in in the afternoon to settle details with Mr. Schneider."

"Say, at five," added the correspondent.

"I will be here at five punctually," answered Forster, bowing himself out.

"Did you notice how he started and how he changed colour when I spoke of sending him to Paris?" remarked the editor, whilst Forster was going down the stairs.

"Yes, indeed," answered Schneider. "It was noticeable enough."

"What can it mean, do you think?"

"Well, perhaps he had a bad time of it over there, and you reminded him of it. Perhaps he has debts there. I don't know. I believe him to be a respectable fellow, and I know he is intelligent."

"And that is all we want, after all," said the editor. "I must say I like his look. Well, I hope he will distinguish himself."

This was precisely the same wish that Forster was making as he walked down the Strand towards home. He had not been so happy for years and years. Fortune was at last smiling on him, and had given him a chance; the chance he had prayed for in vain so long. If he could only satisfy Mr. Mundy, his future would be assured, and once on the

right road what would prevent him from achieving great things?

"If only I distinguish myself! If only I distinguish myself!" he repeated, as he let himself into his lodgings.

His preparations did not take him very long. His first care was to change the suit he was wearing, and which was his best, for one better suited for the night-travel. He finally decided upon an old tweed suit, which was lying at the bottom of his trunk, but before putting it on he took it to the window, and examined each piece carefully. Seeing some stains on the waistcoat, he appeared to hesitate, but the next minute he smiled and shrugged his shoulders. He then proceeded to dress, and afterwards packed his valise. When this was done, he noticed that the top button on his jacket was missing, and called up the servant girl to sew on another. He then carried his valise down-stairs, and before leaving the house told the landlady that he was leaving and settled his account. He next walked to a hair-dresser's and had his hair and beard, which had been rather neglected for some time, trimmed and tidied. From the hair-dresser's he went to a pawnshop in the Strand, and as soon as he was attended to, produced a frayed and dirty ticket, which he handed to the assistant, with the words, "I suppose it's no use making any enquiries about that, is it?"

The clerk took the ticket, and after a rapid glance at the number printed on it, exclaimed, "No, I am afraid not. It's two years since that was issued, and it has not been renewed."

"I know," said Forster; "but then you don't always dispose of your unredeemed pledges, do you? If that brooch is still in the shop, I am quite ready to buy it back at a fair price. Do please look for it. I am really most

anxious to have it back. It's a matter of conscience," he added gaily.

Meanwhile the assistant had been referring to a big folio register. He looked up at Forster's last remark, and stared at him. Then, after again referring to the book, he handed back the ticket and said, "No, we haven't that pledge in the shop. It was sold nearly a year ago."

"You don't know to whom, I suppose?" asked Forster.

"No, very difficult to say. Should have to consult Mr. Atter. If you would call in again, you might ask him about it. And now, will you please excuse me? there is a customer in the next box."

"It doesn't matter, after all," thought Forster as he issued into the street. "There's no danger, and what's done can't be helped."

With these words he thrust the pawn-ticket into his side-pocket, and set out for the *Informer* office.

Mr. Schneider was expecting him, and after a few words, modelled both in tone and phraseology on what the chief had said that morning, he gave Forster his letter of credentials, and ten sovereigns.

"Don't ask for another remittance until you have sent in at least the equivalent of that," he said, whilst the receipt was being signed. "And by the way, if you come across anything interesting in the general news way, send it along. This art notion is all very well, but, personally, I'd prefer a good murder story. I say, Forster, you're a very nervous fellow. You start like a girl."

"Did I start?" asked Forster, without looking up from the table. "It's true I am rather nervous."

"Well, give me that receipt, and don't trouble about those papers on the table. They are quite private. Ah, there is a story, if you like," cried the correspondent with

pride, as he picked up the MSS. "Something to attract attention, that is."

"I hope my work will attract attention also," said Forster, with a smile.

"Yes, so do I," said Schneider doubtfully. "Well, good evening. Try to distinguish yourself in Paris."

"I will," cried Forster, turning round in the doorway.

"I will indeed,"

CHAPTER II.

THE ARREST.

THE tide having been unfavourable, it was broad daylight before the steamer from Newhaven came alongside the quay in Dieppe harbour, where the Paris train was in waiting. Forster, who had crossed that night, took his seat in a third-class carriage. Though he had been sadly knocked about during the crossing, he was looking and feeling in very high spirits. In the first place, he was going to see Paris again, and Paris had an extraordinary attraction for him, and then it was now in his power to earn money and distinction, which he coveted far more. Shortly after they left Dieppe he went to sleep in his corner, and did not wake again until just as the train was steaming out of Rouen station. He had barely had the time to notice that there was only one other occupant of the carriage besides himself, and that this person was staring pretty hard at him, when the train entered the long tunnel on the "up" side of Rouen, and plunged him into darkness. He was closing his eyes preparatory to going to sleep again, when suddenly he heard a voice just in front of him pronounce the words—"Pierre Lafargue! Pierre Lafargue!" At the same time a vesta was struck, and by its light he saw that his travelling companion was staring straight into his face. Bewildered and confused, it was some seconds before Forster could find words to express his surprise at this

conduct, and to remonstrate with the stranger for startling him in that manner.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said the other, dropping the match; "I thought I recognised a friend of mine." This was spoken in a peculiar tone of voice, and with a pronounced southern French accent. "I did startle you, apparently—very much, didn't I?"

"Yes, indeed," answered Forster; "and I hope you won't do it again."

"No; I know all I want to know," said the voice in the dark. "No need to do it again. I see that you are not the man I fancied—Pierre Lafargue."

So saying, he struck another vesta, but apparently only for the purpose of lighting his cigar. At the same time the train issued out into the open, giving the men leisure to examine each other with greater ease.

Forster's companion was a tall, elderly man, with small, close-set, black eyes, a florid complexion, a thick black moustache, and curly black hair. He was dressed in a somewhat shabby greatcoat of peculiar cut, and wore a high hat of the worst style. In one hand he held a massive stick, through the top end of which a leather loop and tassel were passed.

"You're from Marseilles, I see," said Forster, with a laugh. "And fond of a joke."

"No, seriously," answered the stranger, "I took you for a friend of mine."

"Come, do I look like a Pierre this, or a Jacques that? Anybody can see that I'm an Englishman."

"Yes, now that you speak, I recognise that. Not that you speak French badly. I fancy you must have lived in France before. That's so, is it not?"

"Yes," said Forster, plunging his hands into his side

pockets to warm them. "Yes, I lived in Paris three years, but I left it in 1880—in the beginning of 1880. So you see my Parisian accent has had time to grow rusty."

The man made no answer, but after nodding his head in an absent-minded way, took a newspaper from his pocket and began to read. Forster, who had no wish whatever to continue the conversation with a man, whose appearance was as offensive as his manners, hugged himself together, and was not long in falling asleep in his corner. A minute or two later the stranger laid down his paper, and bending forward scrutinized the face, figure, and dress of the sleeper, with an air of intense anxiety and interest, but with a puzzled expression withal. After a while he moved to the further end of his bench, and observed him from this new point of view. He then took out a bulky pocket-book, and selecting a telegraph form from the papers it contained, wrote out a brief despatch, which he marked "Urgent." He had just signed it, when Forster moved in his sleep. The stranger looked up and saw him pull his hand out of his left side pocket, bringing with it a piece of dirty white card which fell on to the seat by his side. The big man flushed up, and sat motionless, holding his breath and keeping his eyes on the scrap of pasteboard. Then, having convinced himself that the motion had been purely and simply unconscious, he moved gently and gradually along the bench until he was nearly opposite the sleeper. He then put out his hand with a cat-like motion and picked up the card. He spent fully five minutes in examining it, as if the printed and written matter puzzled him. The result, however, seemed to satisfy him, for he gradually broke into a smile of triumph, and after casting one or two curious glances at the sleeper, set to work to re-write his despatch. When this was done he placed the pawn-ticket in his

pocket-book, and stowed it away in his great-coat. A few minutes later the train stopped at Vernon, and here the stranger noiselessly opened the door and darted off to the telegraph office, where he handed in his telegram. "See that it goes at once," he said to the employé, in a commanding tone. "It's of vital importance." Then, as if a sudden thought had struck him, he darted back to his carriage. He found Forster awake and looking out of the window. He noticed that a look of disappointment crossed the Englishman's face when their eyes met. He answered this with a smile, and as he took his seat again, he remarked, "It's bitterly cold this morning, isn't it?"

"I don't find it so," said the Englishman, curtly. "You see I travel without a greatcoat."

"You have blood in you," said the stranger, with a significant smile.

"I am not going to talk to that cad any longer," thought Forster, turning away his head. "He looks like some comic singer down on his luck, or a betting-tout."

"We Marseilles people," continued the other, "are a chilly lot. But, hullo!" he cried, looking out of the window, "what's that? There's quite a stir at the end of the platform. What's the matter, my good woman?"

"It's the executioner," answered the peasant woman whom he had addressed, speaking in a low voice. "It's Mr. Minger returning to Paris after this morning's work at Vernon."

"Ah, yes; the Romorin affair. But what's the fuss about?"

"There is not an empty compartment in the train, and people object to travel with him. A man just threatened to break his head if he got into his carriage. I must say I should not mind his company. His trade is as much a trade as any other."

"But tell him to come in here; I should be delighted. The executioner's," cried the stranger, drawing his head in and addressing Forster, "a capital fellow, I assure you. Full of anecdotes. You have no objection, I'm sure."

"Most certainly I have," cried Forster, irritably. "I wouldn't travel with him at any price. Just think what he comes from. If you bring him in here I'll pitch him out of the window, I give you my word."

"Oh," cried the peasant woman, as she entered the compartment, "there's no danger of his coming here. He travels at Government expense, and rides first-class. Besides, he's got seated at last."

The rest of the journey passed without further incidents. Forster was very pleased when they got inside the Paris fortifications, for the conversation of the stranger and the peasant woman, which was exclusively about the morning's execution and kindred topics, had both annoyed and disgusted him. He had refused to take any part in it, though the Southerner made frequent attempts to engage him in the discussion.

"Paris, at last," he cried, as the train stopped alongside the Gare St. Lazare platform. "And not too early, either, for I'm sure if I had had to put up with this much longer I should have knocked that fellow's head off. I am quite positive he's been intending to annoy me all the time."

With these words he took up his valise, and made for the door. The peasant woman had already disappeared, but the Marseilles gentleman was standing on the platform in company of a little old man, as shabbily dressed as himself. Both stared hard at the Englishman as he passed, and in so offensive a manner that he halted for an instant, and looked as if he was going to ask them for an explanation of their rudeness. It was for an instant only. The

next he shrugged his shoulders, and muttering "What can one expect of such cads?" passed out into the street.

As he walked down the Rue d'Amsterdam, he began to think about where he should lodge during his stay. He wished to be as economical of the journal's money as possible.

His knowledge of cheap hôtels was an extensive one, but he had various reasons for not wishing to return to any of the houses at which he had stayed on previous occasions. After some reflection he decided upon a small hôtel on the Boulevard St. Michel, opposite the Sorbonne, and accordingly turned his steps in that direction. In the Rue Tronchet he entered a bookseller's shop and purchased a Salon hand-book, which gave the addresses of all the artists who were in the habit of exhibiting, for he was resolved to begin work at once. As he left the shop he noticed that a little old man, who wore blue spectacles, and who was much muffled up, was loitering outside.

This little man he saw again as he entered a shop in the Rue St. Denis. Here he purchased a cheap ready-made overcoat, for the cold was too much even for his sturdy frame. Feeling chilled after he had put it on, he turned up the collar and crushed his felt hat down over his ears before continuing his walk. Then at a brisk pace he crossed the Place du Châtelet and made his way down the Boulevard du Palais, across the bridges, and into the Place St. Michel. Here, apparently by mistake, instead of going straight on up the Boulevard St. Michel, he took the Rue de la Hucherie on his left, and then turned to the right up the Rue de la Harpe. About half-way up this street he was seen to pause, and to be examining with apparent interest the front of a dilapidated and disreputable lodging-house, which was dignified with the pompous name of

"Empire Hôtel." After loitering thus a few seconds, he was seen to take a few steps across the street as if it were his intention to enter this sinister establishment. Then, after another hesitation, he turned to his left and continued up the Rue de la Harpe until he reached the Boulevard St. Germain, from which about two minutes' brisk walking brought him to his hôtel. Here he engaged a room for a month and paid the thirty-two shillings rent in advance. He then changed his clothes, and went out to breakfast at a neighbouring restaurant. It was whilst at this meal that he noticed the old gentleman for the third time. This person was breakfasting at a table just opposite to the one at which he was sitting; and in spite of his attempts to conceal the reason of his presence, it was pretty evident that he was there to watch somebody. The glasses of his spectacles were not sufficiently opaque to hide the restless motions of his piercing eyes, and the way he toyed with the dishes set before him proved that business of some sort and not appetite had brought him into the restaurant.

"Supposing it is a detective," thought Forster, turning pale; "on the watch for somebody. Supposing he is on the look out for me."

This last thought troubled him so much that he hastily finished his meal, and as hastily left the house. Once outside, his curiosity prompted him to wait and see whether his fears had been founded, and whether the old man would follow him. A minute or two later this person came out, smoking a big cigar, hailed a cab and drove away without a single glance at the Englishman, who had watched him narrowly.

"What a fool I am," cried Forster, as he made his way home. "As if there was any danger of *that*. No, no. I am forgotten. Forgotten long ago."

Completely reassured, he spent the rest of the afternoon in writing notes to the various artists whose names were given in the hand-book, announcing his visit and its object. When he was about half-way through this preliminary work, his stock of stationery running short, he ran out on to the Boulevard to procure a fresh supply. Whilst the stationer was wrapping up his purchases in an old newspaper, Forster saw his morning's travelling-companion swaggering past the window, and turned his back, anxious not to be recognised by such an unpleasant fellow.

He finished his correspondence in time for the last collection, and, having posted the letters, determined to take an evening's enjoyment previous to the month of hard labour which lay before him. Accordingly, having dined comfortably at Boulant's, he crossed over to the Café Vachette and ordered a mazagran and cognac. Whilst he was enjoying these and a delicious cigar he got into conversation with a very pleasant young man who was sitting at the table next to his, and who introduced himself as a law student, freshly arrived in Paris. Down in his provincial town, he said, he had heard a great deal about the pleasures of Paris, but so far he had seen little of them, and bored himself vastly. It was true, he had as yet made no friends. Forster, being in an excellent humour and liking the fellow's manner, cried out on hearing this, "Well, I am going in for some of the pleasures of Paris myself to-night, and if you like to go with me I'll show you round. That's rather a bold offer from an Englishman to a Frenchman, isn't it? But they say, we foreigners know Paris better than the Parisians themselves."

The law student gladly accepted the invitation, and insisted on an exchange of cards.

"At least," he said, as Forster handed him his, "I

must tell you my name, as, I remember, I left my case at home. My name is Leclerc, and I live at the Hôtel de Peru."

"On the Boulevard here?" cried Forster. "Opposite the Sorbonne? Yes? Why, I am living there, too, since this morning."

"Ah," said Leclerc, "then we are countrymen, you see. All the more reason why we should be friends. I hope to see a good deal of you while you are in Paris."

After half-an-hour's general conversation, Forster paid for the drinks and proposed they should take a look round Bullier's Hall, where a "fête" was announced for that night.

"Oh, I shall be delighted," cried Leclerc. "I have heard so much about Bullier's. But, stay, I must ask you to allow me a minute or two. I have a note to write. It's rather important."

The waiter having brought the necessities, the young man hastily wrote a few words on a sheet of letter paper, folded it up, put it in an envelope, and addressed it. He then called a commissionaire and gave him the letter, bidding him carry it to its destination at once. The commissionaire glanced at the address, stared at the two young men, made a bow, and darted off.

"You must think me rather mysterious," said Leclerc, rising with a laugh.

"Some love affair, I'll wager," said Forster, as they turned into the street.

"Something analogous," cried the other, taking his arm.

Chatting pleasantly together, the two young men reached Bullier's, where they passed the next three hours. Forster was much bored with the fête, and wanted to go

away almost directly, but yielded to the representations of his new friend, who expressed himself delighted with the gaiety of the scene, so novel to him. Delighted as he was, he took no part in any of the dances, but stuck to Forster's arm all the time, except on one occasion, when a young man beckoned him into the garden, where he was absent for a minute. This was just before midnight, Forster was beginning to feel very tired, and when his friend returned he insisted on going home.

"You can stay here, of course," he said, "but I am really too done up. And I have hard work before me to-morrow."

"No, no," cried Leclerc. "I won't leave you. We'll be off now. I'm sorry that you have been sacrificing yourself for me. You do look tired."

"I say," he continued, as they passed out into the boulevard, "You really mustn't walk home. It's a long way off. We'll take that cab. No, I won't take a refusal. You have been standing treat all night, and it's my turn now."

So saying, and before Forster could make any remonstrance, he hurried him towards a four-wheeler, which was standing close by, opened the door and pushed him in, himself following.

"But you gave no address to the cabman," cried Forster, in surprise.

"Yes I did," replied the other, curtly. "He knows where to go to."

Forster noticed the change of tone but was too fatigued to trouble his head in speculation as to its cause, and leaning back against the padded lining began to doze. His companion never spoke a word, but sat opposite him, as if anxious not to trouble his slumbers. Slumber, the Englishman did not, for the violent rate at which the cab was speeding along was enough to keep him from falling into

complete unconsciousness. Some minutes later, the turning of a corner at full speed jolted him into a sitting position, and, opening his eyes, he glanced through the window and cried, as the cab suddenly stopped in a dark and desolate spot: "Why, where are we? I thought the fellow was going wrong."

Just then two men appeared at the window through which he was looking into the road, and at the same moment he felt himself seized from behind by the throat.

CHAPTER III.

THE COURT OF ASSIZE.

WHEN Mr. Schneider next saw Forster, it was as he entered the dock of the Paris Assize Court. The hall was crowded with that audience which, in Paris, never misses a *cause célèbre*, and the case which was being brought against the young Englishman had, by reason of the peculiar nature of the crime of which he was accused, as well as for the fact of his having so long escaped justice, developed into a veritable *cause célèbre*. On this account, as well as for the reason that the prisoner had been in his employ at the time of his arrest, Mr. Mundy had shown the greatest interest in the case, and Mr. Schneider had been specially sent over from London to report the trial fully. But he was to do more than this. "For," as Mr. Mundy had said to him, "this is a very serious thing for the *Informer* that one of its reporters should be accused of so foul a crime. You can imagine the capital that the opposition papers will make of this. They will say that it is very remarkable that one of the staff of a paper, which has always professed to be the enemy of crime and the avenger thereof, should be arrested for murder, and so on, and so on. Now, what I want you to do is to watch the case most carefully, and to note down everything possible in the evidence that looks in the lad's favour. Then, if, as I fear from the accounts that the papers are giving of the evidence that has been got up against him, and the absurd

line of defence that he has adopted, the fellow is convicted, we shall have the material for working up a grand story, and, by putting forward all the evidence that there is in his favour, arouse the sympathy of the public on his behalf. You know how they are in New York. The thing properly managed might be a very good thing for the *Informer*, and, if by our efforts we can get him away from the guillotine, which they assure me is awaiting him, it will be one of the best things the *Informer* has done for itself for some time past. Therefore, keep your eyes carefully open and note down every possible thing in his favour, as well as every bit of injustice shown him by the presiding judge. I believe that the French judges are abominably partial and act more as prosecuting counsels than as judges. All that will have to be brought out in the story we shall make about this, if the boy is convicted." He had also added as a kind of afterthought: "Besides, I don't believe the fellow ever did anything of the sort. I liked his look, and I am quite sure that he is no murderer. So you look out, Mr. Schneider, and be as attentive as if you were holding a brief for the defence."

It was at about ten minutes to eleven on the morning of a bright day in July, that Mr. Schneider, thus primed, entered the court, and having been shown to a front seat on one of the benches, which are supposed to be reserved for the use of those of the witnesses who, having deposed, may wish to hear the rest of the trial, but which usually, as on this occasion, are invaded by the general public, spent the time that elapsed before the trial began in looking round the hall, which in many ways presents a curious and impressive *coup d'œil*. The walls are coloured blue, on which, in elaborate stencilling of gold, are worked various symbolical patterns, the balances, the sword, as well as such

words of serious import as *Lex, Fas, Jus*. Right at the back, hanging high up in the air, where every man can see it, is the remarkable picture of the crucifixion by Bonnat, a writhing Christ, in whose tortured limbs human suffering is portrayed in the most masterly fashion. It hangs just behind the semi-circular table at which the judges sit. At the far end of this table is the desk of the *Procureur de la Republique* or prosecuting counsel, and opposite him sits the clerk of the court or *greffier*. On the right is the jury-box, and opposite this is the dock, which accommodates not only the prisoner but the pressmen. On great occasions, prisoners and pressmen sit almost side by side. The same door of exit and entrance is also used by them. On the wall behind the dock hangs a large Louis XV. cartel, loudly ticking. The dock faces the windows, which are all on the side of the jury-box. The prisoner is thus in full-light, while his judges are in semi-obscurity. Between the prisoner's-dock and the jury-box, which are directly opposite one another, is a small stand with a semi-circular rail in front of it which is used as a witness-box. In front of this stands the table on which the *pièces de conviction*, or objects of evidence, are laid out. The defending counsel sits on a bench just underneath the dock, being separated from his client only by the wooden partition. The rest of the hall is given up to the public, and affords accommodation—either sitting on the benches supposed to be reserved for the witnesses, or standing in the space at the far end of the court—for several hundred persons. It was crammed, and many of the people in the crowd belonged to the highest circles in Parisian society. There were many ladies present dressed in gay, summer toilettes, making the hall bright as a garden parterre. Discussion was rife on every side as to the probabilities of

the verdict, and the greater or less chance of an acquittal, in which none, by the way, believed, when the sound of an electric bell was heard, and a black-robed official came running into the court and cried out hastily, and not without importance; "The Court, gentlemen. Stand up and take off your hats. The Court. Stand up, keep silent, and take off your hats." As he spoke, the judges made their entrance. The president came first, with a formidable case of papers under his arm. He was followed by his two assessors, similarly burthened. These were in scarlet robes, and wore sexagonal-shaped caps on their heads. Immediately behind them came the public prosecutor, also in red, who in his turn was followed by the *greffier* or clerk of the court, in black. The swearing-in of the jury was at once proceeded with, and these having been admonished to try the case "without fear or favour, without hatred or wickedness, as befits honourable freemen," the judge ordered one of the Gardes de Paris, who was standing in the dock, "to introduce the accused." Immediately afterwards Forster, accompanied by two guards, appeared at the little door. His appearance provoked a general rising of everybody present in curiosity to see his face. He was looking very pale and jaded, and stepped down to his seat in the corner of the front bench in a tired way. When he had reached it, he bowed to the judges and stood waiting the president's pleasure with his eyes fixed with evident admiration on the wonderful crucifixion on the wall behind. His artistic enjoyment was not, however, allowed to last very long, as he was presently called upon by the president, who spoke with unnecessary sharpness, to sit down and to attend to what was going on. He had barely taken his seat when he was bidden to rise again, while the *greffier*, also rising,

proceeded at the order of the president to read out in a monotonous gabble the *acte d'accusation*, or Story of the Crime. This ran as follows :—

“At eight o'clock on the morning of January 14th, 1880, Mr. Simon Durand, proprietor of the furnished hotel in the Rue de la Harpe, was summoned to the fourth floor of his house by the cries for help that came from his servant, the house-porter, Michel Vaillant. On reaching the fourth floor, Durand discovered that the reason of his servant's cries was that he had discovered, lying weltering in his blood, the body of the old man, Pierre Lafargue, who was the occupant of a small room on the floor of that hotel. The room was in the greatest disorder. The furniture was upset and broken, and every evidence was afforded that a violent struggle had taken place between the victim and his assassin. What had been the motive of the crime did not take long to discover. Amongst the articles that strewed the floor were various articles of jewellery, whilst the bureau, in which it was known that the victim kept his money and valuables, was broken open. Durand immediately despatched the man Vaillant to the police, and closed the door of the room. As soon as the Commissary of the quarter, accompanied by a doctor attached to the police, and an examining magistrate had arrived, the scene of the tragedy was again entered upon, and a careful inspection of the premises forthwith proceeded with. It was evident at once to the magistrate that robbery had been the cause of the murder, which had been carried out with singular ferocity. Indeed, the doctor discovered on the body of the murdered man no less than seventeen wounds, all inflicted with a knife, of which no less than fifteen were mortal. The opinion of the learned specialist was that death had taken place some six

or seven hours before the body was discovered, that is to say, between one and two o'clock in the night of the 13th of January. These facts having been come at, a careful inspection of the floor ensued, but, beyond a horn-button of peculiar shape, nothing in the way of a clue was discovered. The magistrate then proceeded to a summary hearing of all the people of the house, and from their several testimonies the following particulars were elicited. The man Lafargue was, it appears, a usurer, who, in spite of his sordid appearance, and the extreme parsimony of his way of life, was in a very large way of business, as was conclusively proved afterwards by the inspection of his books. His principal line was to lend out, on the principle known as "the little week," advancing a small sum repayable by weekly instalments at an enormous rate of interest. He also lent sums of money to women on their jewels, and had besides an extensive *clientèle* amongst the poorer students and clerks of the quarter. All this business was transacted at a miserable little office in the Rue de Vaugirard, and only very few of his customers were in the habit of visiting him at his private room in the furnished house of the Rue de la Harpe. This rendered the identification of the murderer an easier task, for it was evident from the time when the murder was committed that the culprit was a man who was quite familiar with the house as well as with the habits of the victim.

The evidence of the man Vaillant, house-porter, which was next taken, was to the effect that during the previous night he had been awakened twice, at an hour which he could not exactly define at the moment, by a person entering the house and leaving it some time afterwards. His wife, the woman Vaillant, corroborated her husband in this particular but added that people were coming in and out of the house at all hours of the night.

The next point which the magistrate essayed to elucidate was as to the names and addresses of all persons who were in the habit of visiting the murdered man, and in this their task was considerably lightened by the discovery in one corner of the bureau-drawer of a list of the names of such special customers. Immediately summonses were issued to each of the parties mentioned in this book, and these were despatched by various inspectors attached to the Surety. Every one of these persons placed himself readily at the disposal of the magistrates, with only one exception. This exception was the man Robert Forster, who had strangely disappeared from his hôtel that very morning. This peculiar circumstance, combined with the fact that all the other parties examined were able to give a satisfactory account of themselves, aroused the magistrate's suspicions, and these became stronger and stronger, when it transpired, from the evidence of the landlord of the house where the man Forster had been living until the night of the crime, that on the preceding day he had an angry scene with his lodger, who was deeply in his debt, and had threatened him with expulsion on the morrow if his arrears were not fully paid up, that Forster had answered that he should be paid in the morning, and had then gone out, spending the whole of the night outside, returning only in the morning, when, faithful to his promise, he discharged his debt, and presently disappeared—never to be seen again. These circumstances induced the magistrates to enquire more deeply into the antecedents of the missing man, and it was discovered that he had been living by various shifts in Paris for some time, never doing any regular work, but giving himself out for an artist on the strength of some feeble attempts at black and white work, which he had executed for some of the minor illustrated

papers. He was a frequent customer of the old usurer in the Rue de la Harpe, as was proved by the numerous entries of his name in Lafargue's book. It transpired that he was constantly visiting the old man at all hours of the night, and the natural suspicions thus aroused were fully confirmed by a remark made by the woman Vaillant, who declared to the examining magistrate that when on the night of the crime she had been awakened by the entrance and the exit of the person, who, according to the doctor's evidence, must have been present at the time that the old man died, she had cried out to her husband, "I am sure it is that dirty Englishman. He is always coming in and going out at the strangest hours." All these things being taken together, the examining magistrate thought sufficient evidence had been got together to warrant him in issuing a warrant for the arrest of the man Forster. This person, however, as has already been explained, had disappeared, and in spite of the minutest and most careful researches made could not be found. It was understood that he had gone to America, but the search made for him by the police-agents on that side failed as completely as those in Paris. After the usual lapse of time the affair was, in the parlance of the police, classified—that is to say no further active steps were taken to effect an arrest which seemed impossible. Hazard, however, that most puissant ally of the police, hazard, I say, or as some would term it—perhaps rightly—the hand of Providence, effected what the ablest detectives of the Parisian police force had been unable to perform. A few months ago circumstances led the detective Rouillard to take a journey down to Rouen. Having transacted his business there, this man, who, I should explain, had had chief charge of the Lafargue case while it was still being investigated, happened to take the early train to Paris, the

train known as the English mail, which brings to Paris the passengers by the Newhaven-Dieppe line. Imagine the surprise of this man when on entering the carriage he espied sitting in one corner, and feigning to be asleep, the very man who for so long had baffled all his endeavours. There was no mistaking the man, whose exact description was in the possession of every member of the French police, and who, by a piece of braggadocio, which it is not easy to understand, was wearing the very clothes which he wore on the night of the murder. Nay, the blood-stains of his victim were still visible on the coat, which figures among the *pièces de conviction*. At first the detective Rouillard could not believe his eyes, and it was not until he had essayed a *ruse* that he became convinced that the man Forster was indeed before him. He has deposed to the effect that on crying out the name of the murdered man the prisoner twice gave signs of the greatest terror. After a while, however, the prisoner affected to go to sleep, and it was during this sleep that hazard brought to light the strongest piece of evidence against him. Happening to draw his hand out of the sidepocket of his coat, he brought with it a pawnticket, which on examination has proved to be the warranty for a brooch, studded with brilliants, which was one of the objects stolen from the man Lafargue. This brooch, it has been established, was pawned in London, on a date subsequent to that of the murder, by the accused Forster. It has also transpired from the evidence of the pawnbroker's assistant that on the day preceding his departure for France the accused entered the shop and asked for his pledge, and that, when he was told that it had been sold some months previously, he showed the greatest annoyance. There can be no doubt that it was his intention before returning to the scene of

his crime to destroy what he well knew to be the most conclusive proof of his guilt. With laudable zeal the man Rouillard immediately communicated with the police in Paris, and when Forster reached that city he was followed from the moment he left the station to the time of his arrest. The evidence of the agents of the public force who effected this is to the effect that on his way from the station the prisoner, thinking perhaps, too late, as it happened, that he had done an imprudent thing in appearing in the very clothes he had worn at the time of the murder, entered a ready-made clothing establishment and purchased a hat and coat, in which he hoped to escape observation. It was a useless precaution, however, and from the moment he left that shop, disguised as he was, the eyes of one of the agents who had been deputed to follow him were never taken off his figure. It appears from the evidence of the detective, Richard, that before going to his hotel he went and examined the front of the very house in the Rue de la Harpe, the Empire Hotel, where the crime had been committed. It has been frequently observed by psychologists and criminologists that the scenes where their crimes have been committed have always a strange and irresistible fascination for the criminals, and this is decidedly a case in point. The same day the accused Forster was arrested as he was leaving a place of debauchery, in the company of one of the secret police. An investigation being made at the room he had hired on his arrival in Paris that morning led to the discovery that among his papers was a fragment of an old copy of *Le Petit Journal*, giving full particulars of the crime in the Rue de la Harpe. It was also discovered that the button found in the room where the murder was committed was the same as those garnishing the coat that the prisoner wore, of

which the full proof is among the *pièces de conviction*. The explanations of the accused before the examining magistrate removed any doubt that might have existed as to his guilt. His system of defence is puerile, though, doubtless, it is considered the acme of casuistry by the prisoner. He adopts the well-known system of admitting all that is obvious, and of denying whatever it is possible to deny. He admits that he knew the man Lafargue. He admits that he was in his room on the night of the crime, though he maintains that he left it before the clock struck one, that is, before the time the murder was committed. He admits that the button is the one missing from his coat and since replaced. He admits having had in his possession the brooch which was stolen from Lafargue, and he admits having attempted to redeem it before returning to Paris. He does not deny that on that occasion he used, speaking to the pawnbroker's assistant, the strangely inculpatory words: "It was a case of conscience." He admits all these things while giving explanations of the absurdest and most impossible kinds. He admits that on the night preceding the crime he was in a state of so great penury that he could not satisfy the claim of his landlord. The actual commission of the crime, however, he has never ceased to deny, and that with so much energy that it has become evident to all that have been brought into contact with him that this is a criminal of no ordinary resolution and force. From the evidence collected against him as well as from his own admissions, his guilt is superabundantly proved and all right-thinking men will receive his explanations of the coincidences against him with contemptuous disbelief. It is too apparent from the whole character of the crime, from the adroitness with which he eluded arrest for so many years, the cunning of his defence,

and the extreme energy of his denials of all direct accusations, that this is a customary of crime; one of those dangerous foreign bandits who, tempted by the wealth of this city, settle here, rewarding the large-handed hospitality of France by leaving murder and rapine in their traces when they desert her.

Robert Forster is therefore accused:—

1st. Of having committed wilful homicide on the person of Pierre Lafargue.

With these circumstances.

2nd. That the said wilful homicide was committed with premeditation, by night, in an inhabited house.

3rd. That the said wilful homicide was preceded by, accompanied with or followed by a qualified robbery.

With these circumstances.

4th. That the said qualified robbery was committed by night, in an inhabited house; the culprit being bearer of an arm apparent or concealed.

Offences provided against by Articles of the Criminal Code, 214, 215, 294, 356, 421.

When the *greffier* had finished reading this document he handed it to his assistant, who carried it to the presiding judge. He looked over it, and then turning his head towards Forster, bade him stand up. Between the prisoner and the judge the following dialogue then took place. It should be noticed that in the French law reports, whatever the judge says in addressing the prisoner whom he is examining is put down as *la Demande*, or the question, whether it be question or not, and that what the prisoner says, whether it be answer or statement, is put down similarly as *Reponse*, or answer. The following then is the abridged report of the examination of the prisoner that day:

Q. "Your name?"

A. "Forster, Robert Forster."

Q. "Your age?"

A. "Twenty-six years."

Q. "Your profession?"

A. "Journalist."

Q. "Your address?"

A. "My last address was at the Hotel du Peru, in the place de la Sorbonne. When I was in London"——

Q. "Never mind. Well, then, Robert Forster, attend to me, and answer all the questions that I put to you. You have no judiciary antecedents—that is to say, that this is the first offence of which you have been charged. That does not mean, of course, that you are not guilty of any other offence, but into what you may have done before the crime of which you are here charged, we have no intention of going. Lucky for you if you have so long escaped justice. It is more than probable that a person of the cunning and energy that you have shown was not in this barbarous murder at his *coup d'essai*, but with that, as I said, we have nothing to do here. For us, at least, you appear as a man not previously convicted, and have all the advantages of that position. From the information obtained by the police, and from your own admission, you were in Paris during the month of January, 1880. That was the beginning of the third year of your stay in this city. You admit all that, do you not? Yes, very good. You have never been able to make clear to the magistrates what you were doing during your stay in Paris for means of subsistence. You say that you did some sketches for the illustrated papers, and that you also did a little journalistic work, but you refuse to enter into any particulars, and the inevitable conclusion that must be

drawn from these ambiguous statements is that you depended for your living mainly on theft and robbery. The landlord of the hotel where you lived will tell us that you were a very late riser, and that it was never before the early hours of the morning that you returned home. He will also tell us that your life was a most irregular one, and that you were invariably in arrears with your rent. These things are certainly not crimes in and by themselves, but, taken in conjunction with other things, are invaluable lights on your morality. And now tell us under what circumstances you killed the man Lafargue on the night of the 13th of January?"

A. "As I killed nobody on the night of the 13th of January any more than on the night of the 14th of January, I cannot afford you any satisfaction."

Q. "But you admit having seen Lafargue that night?"

A. "Yes, I called on him shortly after midnight. I left him long before one o'clock, my business with him being very short."

Q. "Tell us what were your relations with this old man."

A. "Those of all the unhappy wretches who frequented him. I was very poor, and being constantly in the want of money used to have to apply to him for loans. I cannot say that the man treated me badly. On the contrary, when he found that I was always regular in re-paying him, he took confidence in me, and at the end used to lend me money on parole, that is to say, without asking for any pledge, and trusting to my honour to repay him."

Q. "Your object in stating that is to explain why no trace of any transaction of the kind you mention appeared in the man's book to corroborate your statement that the object of your visit to him on the night of the crime was an innocent one. The jury will appreciate. You say, then,

that you had not known how to captivate this usurer, that he, notoriously the hardest of men, was in the habit of lending you large sums of money merely on your promise to repay, and that it was to repay some such sum that you went there that night. But in saying that you forget that on the night of the crime you were, from the evidence of the landlord of your hotel, in a state of penury so great that at his menace to turn you into the street you quitted the house and did not return until the next morning, when it is true you were abundantly supplied with money."

A. "I see that the case against me is a strong one, but in explanation of it, I can only repeat what I have said all along to the examining magistrates."

Q. "Repeat it here for the benefit of the jury. It will enlighten them as to your powers of fabulation."

A. "At that time I owed the man Lafargue the sum of ten francs, representing a sum of five francs he had lent me the week previously at the usual rate of interest. On the night of the 13th, by the last mail from England, I had received a sum of money. It was in a cheque on London, and so, though I was possessed of money, I was unable to settle the claim of the landlord, who asked me for his due just a few minutes after the letter came in. I do not think that I mentioned to him that I had received a cheque, and did not show him the letter. That was because I was very angry at the rude way in which he spoke to me. I had for some time past made up my mind to leave Paris, and now that I had this money I determined to delay my departure no longer but to start for London the next day. At the same time I remembered my debt to the old usurer, and, being anxious to repay him before leaving, crossed the river after leaving the hotel, and went to the shop of a bookseller in the Rue de Castiglione, who

knew me, and who, doing some business with the English trade, was always glad to buy English cheques for the purpose of his remittances. His place happened to be open, and he as usual was pleased to oblige me. When I got my money I went and dined at the Café de la Paix, and spent the rest of the evening in walking about the boulevards. Towards midnight I turned my steps homewards, and only then remembered that I had not yet paid Lafargue. It was late, it is true, but I knew the old man never went to bed until an early hour in the morning, and that I was sure to find him in. I accordingly went to the Empire Hôtel, saw Lafargue, repaid him his ten francs, bade him good-night, and went out. My first intention had been to go home, but the night was so beautiful, and I felt so sorry at the thought that I was to leave this beautiful Paris, and that during all the time I had been here I had achieved nothing, but was to return home richer in nothing but years, I felt so melancholy, I say, that I thought I would walk about Paris all night revisiting the scenes that I had so loved, and taking a mournful, and if you like, sentimental, farewell of this adorable city. This plan I carried into execution and spent the whole of the night in walking about the streets. I went to Nôtre Dame and from there to the Halles, and to different other places, returning home to my hotel at about seven in the morning. I then paid my landlord what was owing to him, and shortly afterwards took the morning train to London, where I have been living ever since. For some weeks after my arrival there I was so ill that I could not look at my papers, and it is only since I have been back in Paris that I have heard of the crime that was committed on the person of my miserable old friend. That is the truth and nothing but the truth."

Q. "The jury will appreciate. You will allow me. There

are several points in your statement that want elucidating. You say that on the night of the murder you received a large cheque from London, cannot you tell us from whom you received this money? You have refused to do so for the examining magistrates, but perhaps now you will."

A. "I forget."

Q. "Surely in those days the arrival of a large cheque was a very unusual and a pleasant surprise. Is it likely that you can have forgotten? Why not tell the truth and say that the cheque never existed?"

A. "But it did exist. How could I have paid Lafargue and the landlord and have taken my ticket to London, if I hadn't received it?"

Q. "The prosecution says that you obtained the money for your rent and for your flight from the proceeds of the robbery after the murder. Tell us, who it was that sent you the cheque?"

A. "I cannot."

Q. "The jury will appreciate."

A. "Oh, you are always saying that. I cannot and will not say more than I have said."

Q. "Very good. Let us admit that some unknown benefactor, who had left you for years to starve in Paris, suddenly bethought himself of you, and sent you a cheque for a large amount. Now will you tell us the name of the person who cashed the cheque?"

A. "It was the bookseller whose shop is at the corner of the Rue Mont-Thabor. Millard, I think his name was."

Q. "Unfortunately, Millard's shop was burnt down two years ago, and with it his books. Since then the man has disappeared and it has consequently been impossible to verify the truth of your statement. Is not this a curious—

a very curious—coincidence? But perhaps you remember the name of the bank on which this cheque was drawn? That would materially help you.”

A. “I have tried to remember, but cannot. Of course, as you say, if I could remember the name of the bank I could prove my innocence at once, but unfortunately I cannot.”

Q. “Very unfortunate. So you say that after cashing this wonderful cheque you first spent the evening in pleasure, and then at about midnight—let us say between half-past twelve and one—you crossed the river and went to see your benefactor, the hard-hearted usurer, who used to lend you money at exorbitant rates of interest without exacting from you either pledge or security of any sort, and without making any entry in his books—otherwise full of the most minute details of his business—of your transactions.”

A. “I told you that it was not later than half-past twelve when I left Lafargue. I know that positively, because, when on my way from the Rue de la Harpe to Nôtre Dame I passed the Place St. Michel, and noticed that it was just a quarter to one by the pneumatic clock above the omnibus station.”

Q. “The evidence of the house porter, Vaillant, and of his wife is that you entered the hotel at one and left it at about half-past, which, according to the evidence of the doctor, was the exact time that the murder was committed. However, letting that pass, we will turn to another point on which we shall be glad to have your explanation. At the time of your arrest a pawn-ticket for a brooch studded with brilliants was found upon you. It appeared that this ticket was for one of the objects of jewellery that had been stolen from Lafargue. You admit having had it in your possession, and having pawned it some time after the

murder. You admit having tried to redeem it just before your return to Paris, and that at the time you said that it was a case of conscience. The evidence of the pawnbroker's assistant will be heard on this point. Will you give us your explanation of these terribly incriminating circumstances?"

A. "I can only repeat what I have already said, and said again, to the examining magistrate. As I was returning home to my hôtel on the morning of my nightly ramble, and was passing the bridge St. Michel, I noticed lying in the gutter on the Palace side of the bridge a brooch—the brooch in question. I picked it up, and, not being a connoisseur in these matters, put it into my pocket, thinking that it was some trumpery bauble. I forgot all about it, until some weeks later in turning out my pockets I saw it again. I then laid it in a drawer where it remained until, some days later, being very hard up, I took it to a pawnbroker in the Strand, and asked him what it was worth. To my surprise he said that he could lend me fifty shillings on it, and being, as I say, very hard up at the time, I determined to take the money, indelicate as the act certainly was. However, as soon as ever I got some money, which was not until the other day, I went to get it out, my intention being to take it straight to the police on reaching Paris. Of course, if I had known that it was of value, I should have done so at once, the day I found it. This is the only reprehensible thing I have done in the whole of this business, and I do not think that I am entirely without excuse, especially as the very moment that it was in my power I did my best to remedy what I had done."

Q. "To resume. You say you found this brooch, and that you pawned it in London, and that, being taken with

scruples at this conduct, you tried to redeem the pledge before coming to Paris, with the intention of handing it to the police for restitution to its lawful owner. And do you expect the jury to believe a story like that?"

Whilst the president had been speaking, a number of laughs had been heard amongst the crowd of spectators.

"These laughs are extremely indecent," said the president, looking towards the auditory, "and if they are repeated I shall order the court to be cleared. Ushers and guards, keep a strict look-out, and remove any person permitting himself in any way to disturb the gravity of these debates. The public should remember that a man's head is at stake."

"Oh," cried Forster, "my head is solid enough on my shoulders, thank you."

"The prosecution claim it," said the president, gravely.

The examination then continued.

Q. "Leaving to the jury the task of appreciating the truth or falsity of your account of how the brooch stolen from the man, Lafargue, came into your possession, and your explanation of why you wished to redeem it, I now come to the circumstances of your arrest. You have heard the account given of this during the reading of the act of indictment. Have you any rectification to make in that account?"

A. "The whole thing is a tissue of perverted facts. I did not manifest horror or surprise on hearing the name of Lafargue. I was surprised at the conduct of the man, certainly, and so I think anybody in my place would have been. I thought the fellow was cracked. I did not attempt to disguise myself. I felt cold, and so bought an overcoat. What is more natural than that?"

Q. "And how do you explain the fact that you loitered

about outside the house in which the murder was committed?"

A. "It was simple curiosity—the curiosity of a man revisiting a place from which he has been absent for a long time. It amused me to see the house into which, in former years, I had gone so often a wretched supplicant, and to contrast my misery of then with my prospects of now."

Q. "Excellent prospects, indeed. Enfin. Now, what about that copy of the *Petit Journal*, giving a full account of the crime, that was found in your room?"

A. "A simple coincidence, I should say. It was probably the piece of paper in which the stationer wrapped up the stationery I bought at his shop that afternoon."

Q. "A very strange coincidence, and all the more so that the stationer swears that he has no recollection of having served you at all."

A. "It is very likely that he has forgotten. I cannot give any other explanation than the one I have given."

Q. "Well, let that pass. Now with reference to the button that was found in the room of the Empire Hôtel?"

A. "I recognise it as one that was missing from my coat. I did not know that I had lost it until the other day in London, when I looked out the old suit I had been wearing in Paris that night to travel in. I then saw that the top-button of my coat was missing and had another sewed on by the maid. When the examining magistrate showed me the button, that had been found in Lafargue's room, I saw at once that it was the one. There was no mistaking it, seeing its peculiar shape and colour."

Q. "It is very ingenious of you not to deny what is evident to every one, but unfortunately your frankness will deceive nobody. The coat and the button are amongst the *pièces*

de conviction, and shall be shown to the jury. Usher take out from the *pièces de conviction* articles number 17 and 18 and lay them before the jury."

This having been done and each jurymen being fully convinced that the button did belong to the coat, the president continued :

Q. "Now how do you explain that that button was found in Lafargue's room?"

A. "I cannot explain it otherwise than in the very simple way that whilst I was up there that night, it fell off my coat and remained on the floor, until the magistrate found it in the morning. It surely is not a capital offence to lose one's buttons, is it?"

Q. "Your levity is singularly misplaced. You do not in the least seem to realise the gravity of the position in which you find yourself."

A. "I am innocent, and I cannot believe that that being so I run any danger."

The Court at this juncture adjourned, and whilst Forster was being removed to his cell amidst the suppressed cries of indignation of the crowd, Mr. Schneider ran out to the neighbouring telegraph office and despatched to Mr. Mundy at the London office of the *N.Y. Informer* a short telegram, worded as follows :

"LOOKS D....D BAD FOR FORSTER. SCHNEIDER."

CHAPTER IV.

THE VERDICT.

IMMEDIATELY on the re-assembling of the court, the hearing of the various witnesses for the prosecution was commenced. The first witness was the porter, Vaillant, who deposed as follows:—

“At the time of the murder I was employed as house and night porter at the Hôtel de l’Empire, in the Rue de la Harpe. It was part of my duty to pull the door-string every night to let people in and out of the hotel. There was a general rule, that anybody coming in or going out after midnight should call out his name, but it was rarely observed. I remember the man Lafargue, who was a lodger on the fourth floor of our hotel; he had a small room looking on the street. On the night of the murder I remember being awakened long after midnight by somebody ringing at the door. I pulled the string and saw the person go by the window of my lodge. I cannot say that I recognise the prisoner as having been that person. Some time after—I cannot say precisely how long—I was again aroused by a rap at this window, and someone asking me to pull the door-string so that he could go out. I do not recognise the accused as having been the man, nor can I say that I recognised his voice. I may say that—as both his appearance and his voice, as a frequent visitor of the old man’s, were familiar to me—it has struck me as strange that I did not recognise either the one or the other.”

"Doubtless he was disguised," remarked the Procureur of the Republic, "and changed his voice. Nothing easier."

"I never thought of that," said the witness. "Well, all I can say is that, when we were awakened that second time, my wife said to me, 'For certain it's that wretched Englishman. There's nobody like him for waking people up out of their sleep.' Well, in the morning, when I went up as usual to clean the staircase, I happened to pass the landing on to which the door of Mr. Lafargue's room opened, and was much surprised to see that door standing wide open. I thought something must be wrong, perhaps that the old man had removed his effects without paying rent due, to the sound of the wooden bell. So I looked in and then I saw our lodger lying on the floor in a great pool of caked blood, with terrible wounds all over him, and round him on every side were strewn pieces of jewellery. I did not venture to enter, but holloaed out for the boss, who came up at once."

The next witness was the wife of the preceding, who said: "I remember the night of the crime and being woke up twice about one o'clock. I do not recognise the prisoner as the man who disturbed us, but I have always thought that it was him. In the first place, something told me that it was the Englishman at the time, and then I have always said that that fellow could be up to no good. Besides, these English people——"

She was here interrupted, and sent back to her seat to make room for the landlord of the Hôtel de l'Empire. His very lengthy deposition need not be reproduced *in extenso*. Suffice it to say that he gave a thrilling description of the fearful scene that met his eye that morning, when he penetrated into his lodger's room. He also gave full particulars about the man himself. He swore that Forster was a

frequent visitor, and he remarked that all along he had thought that he was just the sort of fellow to do a bad action at the very first opportunity.

It may be remarked here that cross-examination as we understand it in England does not exist in France, where the defending counsel is placed on an entirely different footing from the prosecuting advocate. The latter, being one of the magistrates, has privileges which are not accorded to the members of the bar, and whilst he is allowed to examine the witness as much as he pleases, the barrister for the defence may only do so with the president's express permission, and through the president himself. The entire examination of the witnesses, except where the prosecuting counsel wishes to elucidate some special point, is carried on through the presiding judge. Cross-examination does not exist, so to speak, at all, in French law-courts.

The next witness was the Commissary of Police, who had been called as soon as the murder had become known. He gave an account of the state of the room when he had entered it, and of the position of the corpse. It was he who had found the button; and on being shown it, recognised it as the one he had found.

He was followed by the doctor who had examined the wounds that had been inflicted on the victim. He described the extraordinary ferocity of the murder in such terms that cries of indignation against the accused broke out among the audience, and the president had the greatest difficulty in obtaining silence.

His deposition was followed by the president reading the reports made by the other magistrates, who had visited the scene of the murder, as well as a *résumé* of their first investigations.

After this the landlord of the hôtel, where Forster had

been staying previous to the crime, was called, and he said :—

“I recognise the accused as my former lodger. I have no reason to remember his stay in my house with any pleasure. He was the very worst payer I have ever had. I don't think that during the whole time he was in my house he ever once paid up to date. I had long had it in mind to turn him out, because of his irregularities, and because I did not like his manner of living, never up till past noon, and out the best part of the night ; and it was on the 13th of January in the evening, that I waited for him and let him have it. I said to him, when I got to see him, that if he didn't pay me in the morning I should pitch him out into the street. He said that he was sorry, that he had no money, but that he would do his best to settle up in the morning. Shortly after that he went out, and I did not see him again until the early morning, when he came to my office and planked down the money he owed me. I noticed at the time that his manner was very strange, and the way he rushed off immediately after paying me struck me as still stranger. When in the afternoon I heard that a robbery and a murder had been committed, I said to myself at once, ‘That's the chap.’ I never saw or heard anything more of him, until I was confronted with him in the examining magistrate's room.”

The next evidence taken was that of the detective, Rouillard, who described at length his meeting with Forster in the train, and the finding of the pawnticket. He was succeeded by his colleagues, who had followed Forster on his arrival at Paris, and had arrested him as he was leaving Bullier's.

Arthur Jones, pawnbroker's assistant, was the next witness. “I perfectly well recollect,” he said, “the pledge

marked on that ticket. It was a brooch, of which I have been shown a very good drawing by the magistrate, who came over to London to take my evidence, and to ask me to come and depose here. I identify the prisoner as the man who pledged it, and also as having come to our shop in the month of January of this year, to ask me whether it had yet been disposed of. His manner at the time struck me as strange, and his expression at the time was also very curious. I cannot say what has become of the pledge since it was sold, but that there is no doubt that it was one stolen from the murdered man."

After each witness had deposed, the president, turning to Forster, said, "Have you any questions to ask this witness," but in a tone that implied that it would be quite useless for him to do so. Forster's answer was each time the same, namely, that the witness had doubtless been speaking the truth, and that he had nothing to ask him. All this produced the very worst impression on the jury, who saw in each of these answers an admission on the prisoner's part of his guilt.

After Arthur Jones came a long string of witnesses of minor importance, the hearing of whom lasted up till five or six in the evening. The Court was adjourned again at this point, and on resumption the president asked whether it was the intention of the defence to call any witnesses? When Maître Guérin answered in the negative, the president smiled, and turning towards the jury remarked that he had thought as much.

He then called upon the Procureur of the Republic to address the jury for the prosecution. The red-robed purveyor of the guillotine was on his legs in a jiffy, and forthwith began his requisitory. It was framed in Ciceronian language, dull and pompous, and on an English

jury would have produced quite a contrary effect to the one intended. The worthy Parisian *bourgeois*, however, likes your Ciceronian language, and these listened with great gusto to the wearisome disquisitions. The whole case could have been summed up in a few phrases, but the Procureur took an hour-and-a-half in going over it—and the best part of another hour in a violent peroration against the unhappy prisoner. He said a good deal about the hospitality of France and the ingratitude with which it was received by most foreigners. He painted Forster in the blackest colours, and expressed his firm opinion that, as had been suggested in the *acte d'accusation*, he was a criminal of the blackest die, steeped in crime, and who had owed immunity so far to the extreme cunning of his nature. Fortunately, he added, for the interests of justice, the prisoner had this time over-reached himself, and being now in the power of the law, would, he hoped, meet with his full deserts. He urged the jury to be pitiless. The man had shown no mercy; let none be shown to him. Death, and death alone would satisfy the outraged law of their common country. Nay, it was their duty, as patriots, to punish this man with all rigour. Foreigners mustn't think that with impunity they can come to France and kill and pillage. He pointed his finger at Forster, in conclusion, and cried out, "You that sit quaking there with the blood of the old man still staining your hands, relinquish at last the attitude that you have so long maintained. Show yourself human—that we may not as men have to blush for one of our kind." All this and much more. Forster sat very quietly through it all, paying little attention to the abuse showered upon him. He could see, however, that the effect produced upon the jury was immense, and marked with considerable un-

easiness, that the glances that they from time to time cast at him were by no means reassuring.

When the Procureur sat down there was a burst of applause in the hall, and this time no attempt to hush it was made. It was continuing when Maître Guérin rose to his feet at the little bench in front of the dock, and proceeded to address the jury on the prisoner's behalf.

His argument was that this was a case of fatal coincidence, the very probabilities of which should fill the jury with suspicion. The evidence against the prisoner was too strong to be true. He cited at great length similar cases from the day of the Courier of Lyons downwards. He pointed out that the prisoner had frankly admitted most of the circumstances upon which the prosecution most relied, and urged that this was very unusual conduct on the part of a criminal who, as a rule, denies everything. It had been suggested, he admitted, and with considerable perfidy, he added, that this admission of what was irrefutable was a piece of clever speculation on his client's part, but he asked with what right was such a motive attributed to him? Nothing had been brought against the prisoner to prove that he was a habitual criminal. Could it be supposed that a man would at once step from innocence into such a crime as had been described? Referring to the evidence given by the doctor, he asked the jury if they did not think it very strange, that a man coming to murder for the sake of robbery, the motive attributed to his client should use such unnecessary ferocity. It had been proved that several deadly wounds had been committed, and that the victim had been struck again and again even after life was extinct. Was that the proceeding of the murderer, who had come to steal, or did it not rather point to the conclusion, that the man, Lafargue, had lost his life at the

hands of one of the victims of his usurious practices; some man whom he had ruined and who had revenged himself in this barbarous way? He spoke extremely well and fought manfully, but committed the mistake, rather usual amongst the members of the Parisian bar, of not sticking to one line of defence. Just as he was making a good point in one line of argument, he would go off at a tangent into something else, with the result that the jury had the greatest difficulty in following him. It struck Forster, and this was so—that his barrister had rushed up the case at the last moment. It was a pity, as the man was undoubtedly clever and could have made a great hit in this trial. When he sat down in the end, trembling with emotion after his excited peroration, it was remarked by more than one spectator in court, that the case for the prisoner did not look a bit better then before he had begun to speak. Immediately after the close of the speech for the defence the judge turned to the public prosecutor and asked him if it was his wish to reply. The Procurer hesitated for a moment and then rising bade the jury not to be led away by the argument of the defence, that the ferocity of the crime proved that revenge, or some similar passion, had been the motive of the crime. It was a well-known fact, he urged, that the sight of blood will madden those who shed it. The man horror-stricken at what he had done had struck again and again like a wild-beast. Besides what proved that Forster had not harboured against the man, who had so cruelly exploited him the bitterest feeling? Was it not very probable that the crime was committed both for the purpose of robbery and of revenge? He concluded by once more calling upon the jury to do their duty, terrible as that duty must appear to them.

Maître Guérin again rose, and in his turn replied to the

prosecuting counsel. His second speech was better than the first, for he stuck to one line of argument throughout and tried to show that any motive for such ferocity as had been shown was entirely wanting in the prisoner's case. It was clear to him, and should be clear to the jury, that this was the work of revenge and not of a thief, as Forster had been made out to be.

By the time he had finished he had considerably strengthened the prisoner's case, and more than one juryman was seen to look very grave and thoughtful. Until then there had been noticed on the face of every one of them a stony look of conviction, that foreboded ill for the prisoner.

The president was the next to speak. He addressed himself to Forster this time, and asked him if he had anything to add to his defence. Forster said that he had nothing further to say than that he was completely innocent of the charge, and that he was certain that, that being so, the jury would restore him to liberty.

The president then asked the two counsel whether they had anything further to say, and being answered in the negative, proclaimed in a loud and solemn voice that the debates were now closed. The Court then adjourned and on resumption the *greffier* read over to the jury a long list of questions, which as the judge instructed them they had to answer after due deliberation with a simple "yes," or "no," according to the majority of votes obtained to each question. He then dismissed them to their consulting room and again adjourned the court. Forster was taken out into the little waiting room, which communicates with the Conciergerie prison by a long winding staircase, and there served with a very unpalatable mess of boiled beans and beef accompanied with a small bottle of wine. While he ate one of his guards chatted with him and told him not be down-

cast, as while there was life there was hope. When he had finished his miserable repast he was allowed to light and smoke his cigarette, and after that had a game at cribbage with the guard. Meanwhile everybody in the crowded court-room was discussing the probabilities of the verdict. The only question that agitated the public mind was whether or not there would be extenuating circumstances found by the jury, in which latter case no death-sentence could be pronounced. Everybody thought and hoped that this would not be so, because, having suffered terrible discomfort all day, nobody wanted to be deprived of the poignant emotions of the last fatal act. However the opinion of everybody was that a death-sentence was inevitable.

The jury were out a very long time, and this was just beginning to make the amateurs feel uneasy, when the metallic rattle of the electric bell announcing that they had arrived at their decision was heard. Presently the Court returned, and when the judges had taken their places, the jury were admitted. Amid breathless silence the foreman rises, and, laying his hand on his breast, reads from the paper that he holds in his hand :—

“Upon my honour and conscience, before God and before man, I declare that the verdict of the jury is—On the first question, yes—by the majority; on the second question, yes—by the majority; on the third question, yes—by the majority; on the fourth question, yes—by the majority; and so on, every single charge that had been brought against Forster being answered affirmatively. When the list of questions had all been answered, the excitement in Court grew intense. The question was now—Would the foreman say: We find that there are extenuating circumstances in favour of the accused,

Forster, or would he sit down in silence? In the former case it was a mitigated sentence, in the latter death. The amateurs of strong emotions were, however, not disappointed, for as soon as he had pronounced the last "yes, by the majority," the foreman folded up the paper and sat down. Great sighs of suppressed emotion burst from every breast. Some of the women gave little screams; the men wiped their foreheads. But now the public prosecutor rises and demands the application of the death sentence, and when this has been registered, the president, turning towards a guard, who is lounging in the empty dock, bids him introduce the condemned man. The silence now is breathless; the time seems incredibly long. At last, however, a stir is heard at the door of the dock. The reporters, rising from their seat, cluster round it. The képis of the guards become visible. People jump up on to their seats, amidst the angry cries of those behind, so as to catch the first glimpse of the man's anguish when he hears his fate, and Maître Guérin, breaking down, dashes his handkerchief to his eyes. Forster pauses on the threshold of the door, and tries to read his fate in the eyes of the straining multitude. It should be no difficult task, but he is dazzled with the light, and, before he has time to recover himself, he is dragged forward by the guards, who have each round his wrist, the ends of it in their hands, a lithe and supple cord. Before he knows what is happening to him, he finds himself back in his seat at the extreme corner of the dock, and notices that the jurymen one and all keep their eyes averted from his face. Then Maître Guérin, mastering his emotion, turns round to him, and says; "Courage, my friend, and remember that there is the chance of appeal." The president now bids the *greffier* read over to the condemned man the

full verdict of the jury. This being done, the Procureur of the Republic again demands that sentence of death should be passed on the condemned Forster. The president, rising, adjourns the Court with the words, "the Court will deliberate," and stalks out of the hall, followed by the assessors and the prosecutor. Forster is again taken back to the waiting-room, and sits there, half-dazed, for nearly half-an-hour. The guards try to comfort him, and one says—"After all, it's only a bad minute to pass." But, though he knows that he is about to be condemned to death, he does not in the least realise his position. It seems incredible to him that he should be sentenced to death on such evidence. After long and really useless deliberation the Court returns. The prisoner is again brought in, this time surrounded by a perfect regiment of guards. He is bidden to stand up, while the President of Assizes, covering his head, reads out to him in a quick, unimpressive gabble the decision of the Court. It is a long, formal document, with numerous phrases beginning with "Seeing that," followed by long citations of the law and the lists of various penalties incurred. At last comes the dread words: "In consequence, the Court condemns Forster to the pain of death, and orders that he shall pay the whole costs of this trial," an anti-climax which raises a smile even on the blanched lips of the prisoner himself. The judge concludes by saying: "You have three days in which to sign your appeal for a fresh trial;" and then, turning to the jury, he adds, as he rises from his seat: "To-morrow morning at the same hour, gentlemen, *n'est-ce-pas?*—the audience is closed," and files out in great state, followed by his satellites. Everybody in the body of the hall now makes a frantic effort to catch a glimpse of the prisoner as he is being removed, but he is

hustled out so quickly by the guards that most are disappointed. The hall begins to empty itself, and those outside press forward to hear the news. Mr. Schneider elbows his way out of the crowd, and darts across the road to the telegraph office. Here he writes and hands in the following despatch :—

“ Mundy, *Informer* Office, London.

“ Forster found guilty, and condemned to death. Cannot see the slightest fault to find with either verdict or sentence.”

“ SCHNEIDER.”

He then proceeds to his hôtel, and, after a hurried dinner, sits down in the smoking-room and spends the best part of the evening in writing out a telegram of seven thousand words for New York, giving a full account of the whole trial as described above.

Meanwhile the unhappy Forster has been hurried down into the waiting-room, and thence surrounded by guards down an interminable winding-staircase, which brings him into a narrow passage. He is hustled along through this, and suddenly finds himself confronted with a heavy door. This is unlocked, and he is pushed into a cell where he is at once surrounded by a crowd of prison-warders. Before he knows what they are doing, he feels his arms seized, and the next moment the whole of the upper part of his body is imprisoned in a *camisole-de-force*, or straight waistcoat, which, in France, is the garment in which the condemned prisoner spends the remaining days of his life. His arms are powerless, and, feeling and looking like a sack, he is thrown on to his bed. It is here that presently his counsel finds him. Maître Guérin has come to ask him to sign his appeal for a revision of the trial. This fills him with hope, and, when his right hand has been loosened, he signs his name to the document laid before him. Maître

Guérin then departs, but not without some words of encouragement and comfort.

Shortly after this, the unhappy man goes to sleep in the presence of his two guards. The next morning he is taken out of the court-yard, and bundled into a Black-Maria conveyance, where he is locked up in a little cell. Two guards go with him, and, in company with them, he is jolted over the streets of Paris for a long time. When he alights from the carriage he finds himself in the court-yard of the Roquette prison, and, a few minutes after, after various formalities of registration have been gone through, he is taken to one of the condemned cells. Here he is visited by the governor of the prison, a courteous man, who tells him that, if he will promise to behave himself, the straight waistcoat shall be removed. Forster readily promises, and is at once released. He is then left to pass the time as best he can with his own reflections, or in conversation with his guards. These offer to play him at draughts, and he accepts their offer. In the afternoon he is allowed to walk about in a little court-yard, under the surveillance of his guards. It is a pretty little court with a flowering lilac bush in the centre. Thus his life passes, and thus he will be left until the fatal morning when he will be aroused by the entrance into his room of the crowd of prison-officials, followed by the sinister form in black, that he had seen dimly at Vernon Station. But there is hope still—the appeal for a new trial first, and then the appeal for mercy—and Grévy is a clement man, who has earned among the criminal classes, for this very reason, the title of “Papa Grätias.” No, he has no reason to despair. So he thinks.

CHAPTER V.

AGATHA'S ASSIGNMENT.

ON reaching the Hôtel Victoria on his return from Paris on the night after the trial, Mr. Schneider found waiting for him a short note from Mr. Mundy, saying: "I must see you to-night no matter at what time you come in. You will find me at the *Informer* office." The correspondent accordingly barely took the time for a hurried meal, and at once set off down the Strand. Just as he was entering the house where his office was he came upon a lady coming out.

"Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Ouseley," he cried, raising his hat. "Whatever brings you here at this hour?"

"I have a seat at the Lyceum," said the young woman, "and came here during an *entr'acte* to leave my weekly letter. It's always so much postage saved."

"Oh, very good. But, I say, Mrs. Ouseley, must you be off at once? His Royal Highness is coming here to-night. Perhaps you would like to make his acquaintance?"

"What Royal Highness?" asked Mrs. Ouseley.

"The illustrious Mr. Mundy," answered Mr. Schneider. "Otherwise the editor-in-chief and sole-proprietor of the *New York Informer*."

"Oh, I should like to," said Mrs. Ouseley. "I have always wanted to see an American editor. But I don't want to miss my place in the theatre."

"All right then, you come round during the next *entr'acte*, and I will present Mr. Mundy to you."

The two then separated, Mr. Schneider going upstairs to his office and the young woman hurrying down the Strand on her way back to her seat at the Lyceum. It was past eleven when Mr. Mundy drove up in his private brougham. The first thing that he said when he met Mr. Schneider upstairs was: "This is a d——d bad thing, Schneider."

"Yes, sir," said Schneider. "D——d bad for Forster."

"Oh, bother Forster," said the editor; "I am thinking of the paper. You can't imagine the harm this affair will do us in New York City. You know how they all hate us, can't forgive us our success, and you can fancy how glad they will be to have this to turn against us. You know that, playing as we do the *rôle* of the 'terror to crime and protection of the weak,' and all that sort of thing, we have got the nick-name of 'the angelic choir.' And now one of our reporters goes and gets mixed up in one of the most notorious murder cases of the year, and gets condemned to death, and all that sort of thing, disgracing the paper, and giving us a bad name that not all the explanations in the world will wipe off."

"Yes, certainly, it's a pity that we took that fellow on."

"Yes, but it's no use talking about what is past. What I wanted to see you for to-night is to see what can be done to remedy this affair. You say that you are convinced that the fellow was guilty?"

"I don't see how the jury could have found any other verdict on the evidence that was brought before them. It was the strongest case for the prosecution that I have ever heard," said Mr. Schneider.

"Well, I don't believe it was a true verdict," said Mr. Mundy, decisively. "In the first place, it isn't to my

interest to believe it, and, in the second, I can't bring myself to believe that that fellow, that I saw here, could be anything of the sort. I don't believe he would have the pluck to do such a thing, such a dull, sleepy-looking fellow I never saw in all my life, even amongst your newspaper men over here. No, I don't believe that Robert Forster did that deed, and believe it I won't and can't. And look here, Mr. Schneider, what you have got to do is to prove that he is innocent, and to get him off from the guillotine. That is the only thing that will save us now, and just think what a story that will make. The oppressed *Informers* reporter sacrificed to the blind prejudice of effete, old-world bigotries, and saved in the nick-of-time by his American *confrères*. Innocence, as usual, triumphing at the instance of the *Informers*, and ——"

"Yes, I see the story right enough and the boom that is in it," said Mr. Schneider, "but I declare I don't see how it's to be done?"

"It's got to be done, that's all," said Mr. Mundy, decisively, "and you, Mr. Schneider, have got to do it. There, then that's settled. Let me hear as soon as you have succeeded, and, for the present, good night."

"Oh, but I say, Mr. Mundy!" cried Mr. Schneider, in great trepidation. "Don't go off like that. Who is to look after the London office while I am away. There isn't a soul here that I could trust; and as for you, its out of the question, of course."

"That's true. Isn't there anybody that we could send to Paris on this assignment?"

"Let me see. There's Jobson, and Henricksohn, and——"

"Don't you know of any smart woman-reporter? Haven't you anything in the line of our American girl-

reporters? By Jove, if Joe Pulitzer would let me have Nellie Bly for a week or two I would soon show these French judges their mistakes. But there's no chance of that, of course, and we must do the best we can without her. Come now——"

"There's Agatha Ouseley," said Mr. Schneider, "a smart girl she is, just the right material for the work. But then she's married, and her husband is ill. Besides if we send her who is to do our 'Society notes and gossip?' "

"Society be hanged!" said Mr. Mundy. "Let me see her to-night, and let us get this thing fixed up at once. I am not going to stir from this office until I have sent some one off on this job. I have plenty of men in New York that I could send, and did think of cabling for one to come over, but there is no time to be lost. Somebody must be in Paris and at work by not later than the morning of the day after to-morrow."

"Well, as I say, I can only think of Agatha, and I should say that she would be just the person to do the work well, though, of course, her absurd British prejudices may interfere."

"That can be considered in the price," said Mr. Mundy. "Send for her at once."

"Oh, she'll be here in a minute. She's at the theatre now, at the Lyceum, and I asked her to come round here during the next *entr'acte*, so that I might introduce you to her."

Just as he was finishing this sentence, Agatha was heard on the stairs, and the moment after had pushed open the office door and entered.

Mr. Mundy jumped up as soon as he saw her, and, without waiting to be introduced, stepped forward and said, "Glad to see you, Agatha, I am Mr. Mundy; I want you

to start for Paris as soon as possible. Don't say you can't go!"

"What's it for?" asked Mrs. Ouseley.

"It's to prove that that fellow Forster, the man we sent over there on that studio-yarn, and who has got himself into such a fearful mess, is innocent of this crime. I firmly believe that he has been convicted unjustly, and I won't leave a man of mine to be treated unjustly. You shall have all the money you want, and all the introductions to influential people that you can need. Perhaps if you can't ferret out the truth in time you will be able to get his sentence commuted, and that will give you time to work out the thing carefully afterwards. I want you to go at once. What do you say?"

"I should like to go very much," said Agatha; "I have read the case and I don't believe the man was guilty."

"And why not?" cried Mr. Mundy, stepping forward.

"Because everything was so completely against him."

"That's not much of a reason," said Mr. Mundy in a disappointed tone of voice.

"It's just what his barrister said," said Mr. Schneider. "He said it was too probable to be true."

"If he talked like that I don't wonder at our chap getting convicted. Well then, Agatha, when do you start?"

"As soon as we have arranged about the money, and when I have had time to get some one to look after my husband during my absence."

"That's a good girl," said Mr. Mundy. "As to money you shall have all you need in the way of expenses, and whilst engaged on this assignment shall draw at the rate of twenty-five pounds a week. Should you succeed in proving Forster's innocence I will present you with a cheque for ten thousand dollars. Is that satisfactory?"

"Yes," said Agatha, "that'll do. And now I must be off at once. I'll have to get home to see about making arrangements for my departure. I'd like to start to-morrow morning. As you say, there is no time to be lost. Can you spare me?"

"I like that," said Mr. Mundy. "You're the first Britisher I have seen with any pluck in her. We shall want you over in New York when this is done, Agatha, and run you against Nellie Bly. Oh, but before you go you had better take money for the preliminary expenses. Write out a receipt for fifty pounds, to be accounted for, and Mr. Schneider will draw you out a cheque for it at once. Mr. Schneider."

As soon as the cheque had been written Agatha put it in her pocket, and darted out of the house.

"I like that girl," said Mundy. "What a pity she's married! We could have made something of her in New York."

"Yes, it is a pity, especially as she is married to a brute of a fellow, always sick and cantankerous as he can be," said Mr. Schneider.

"Yes, it is a pity. And now about this Wilson story. Are you sure your information was right. I see Lord Brookshire is indignantly denying having had a son, or rather denies that he has a son alive. On the other hand none of my fellows in New York have been able to do anything, or to find any trace of the fellow. Well, with this big thing coming on, we can afford to let that other drop, for the while at least. If only Agatha succeeds."

"Yes, if only," said Mr. Schneider doubtfully.

"Well, let's hope for the best," said Mr. Mundy; "and now good night, Mr. Schneider, and good-bye for the present. I am going up north to see a bit of Scotland, and

don't think I shall be back for another month or two. You see that this girl keeps to her work, and let her have all the money that she needs. Something tells me that she will come out trumps in the end. I guess that when I next see you I shall have heard what she has been able to do for us."

It was about two months later that Mr. Mundy revisited his office, immediately on his return to town from Scotland. During all the time of his absence he had kept himself purposely aloof from all matters connected with his gigantic newspaper, and it was with burning curiosity that he entered Mr. Schneider's office that afternoon to hear what Agatha had effected.

"Well, what has she done?" he cried after he had shaken hands with his London correspondent.

"She's spent about a thousand dollars beside drawing her salary," said Mr. Schneider "and to-day sends me a full report of her failure. I understand that the execution may take place any morning."

"You don't mean to say so," cried Mr. Mundy, in a tone of the greatest disappointment. "Well, I did hope for better things from that girl. Let me see what she writes."

"I just got it this minute. She says it gives a full account of what she has done, and of the reasons why she has been beaten. In her letter to me she says that she will remain on deck until the very last, but that she has absolutely no hope of being able to save the fellow from Mr. Minger."

Mr. Mundy took the paper from Mr. Schneider's hand, and seating himself, began to read.

Agatha's report (in summary) ran as follows:—

"Immediately on my arrival in Paris, I went to Maître

Guérin's, who did not receive me at all enthusiastically, and who, when I told him what I had come to Paris for, at first refused to assist me in any way, the proceeding being, in his own language, 'the most irregular thing he had ever heard of.' What sticks these people are! However, after much coaxing, and especially, I think, when I made him understand that in the first place money was no object with my employers, and, secondly, that in any case he would get some fine advertising out of it, he consented to do what he could for me. I may mention in confidence that I could see from the way he spoke that in the first place he has no belief whatever in Forster's innocence, and that, secondly, he does not think there is a ghost of a chance of his escaping the attentions of Mr. Minger about two months from this time. Well, with the aid of the papers that he put at my disposal, as well as by reading the stenographic reports in the law-papers, I was able in a very short time to get the whole of the case at my finger-ends, and though I must say that there is against Forster the strongest *prima-facie* case that I have ever heard of, I cannot say that the argument made as to the absence of any motive for so ferocious a crime, is without force. When I had studied the case this seemed to be the only clue on which to work, and I accordingly set about at once to rout up the list of all the persons, who had been in the habit of frequenting the unhappy old usurer at his private address; no easy task I may add, seeing how long ago it was, and the difficulty of getting sight of any papers. You can have no idea of the French bureaucrat until you have had some dealings with him. Well, at last, and by means of considerable expenditure, a schedule of which annexed, I managed all the same to get a pretty full list of such persons, and then my work for the next two or three weeks was to hunt these people up. You

may imagine the difficulty of this. I will not entertain you with a full account of all my adventures, or of what I had to go through before I had finished. Suffice it to say that in the end I acquired the certainty that not one of the persons, whose names I had on that list, could in any way be suspected of the crime. In the meanwhile Maître Guérin was doing all he could to obtain a fresh trial, ~~the~~ appeal for which he based on some trifling irregularity that had taken place during the first one. But from the very beginning he had warned me against hoping for any such event, for he said that the Council of the Court of Appeal is always dead against granting fresh trials unless on very strong grounds; the reason being that such fresh trials cost the treasury a large sum of money, which, in the case of a pauper convict like Forster, can never be recovered. It was just as I concluded my enquiries, and had come to the conviction mentioned above, that the application came on—an application which, as you will see in all the papers, was refused without any consideration of the case whatever. The only thing that remained to hope for was the presidential clemency, because as far as I could see there was no possible chance of any clue to the real criminal turning up before the date fixed for the execution, that is to say, about two weeks after the rejection of the application for the revision of the trial. It was at my suggestion that the barrister undertook to go round to every one of the jurymen who had sat in the case and endeavour to get them to sign a petition to the president to exercise his prerogative. I went with him to each house, and at my suggestion was presented as the youthful *fiancée* of the unhappy man. Need I say that I wept, and they weren't all crocodile-tears either, because I have felt and do feel downright sorry for this poor fellow.

But it was of no avail at all. Although with considerable difficulty we got at every one of the jurymen, not one of them would allow himself to be softened either by my tears or to be shaken in his conviction by the arguments of my companion. I then learned that Forster had been found guilty on all charges unanimously, which is a very rare exception in Paris. At some of the houses they were downright rude to us, and I am sure that I was looked upon as being some very disreputable person, to be affianced to such a fellow. It was no use at all. We didn't get a single signature, and I assure you we tried hard. Maître Guérin then solicited and obtained an interview with the President, but it was not at all a satisfactory one. He told me that Monsieur Grévy barely listened to him, and kept repeating, "Oh, but foreigners mustn't think that they can come to Paris and kill a French *bourgeois* as you would kill a rabbit." He has kept the papers and promised to give them his very best attention, but Maître Guérin does not think that there is any chance of his interfering with the sentence. I may add that the papers here are all against our friend. I tried to get at Mrs. Grévy as the *fiancée* of the convict, but I couldn't get anybody to procure me a proper introduction. Maître Guérin absolutely refused, saying that if the trick was found out it would be his ruin. I then wrote to the old lady imploring her to receive me, but after waiting a short time, I got a very kind note saying that Madame Grévy could not break the rule of the Presidency and receive a stranger in that way. There is nothing for it, then, but to hope that Monsieur Grévy may find something in the papers that may cause him to hesitate. You know the reputation he has for detesting capital punishment, and that seems to be our only chance of saving Forster's life. It is, however, as

I have said, a very small one. Meanwhile I have been working at a forlorn hope in the case, and strange as it may seem, I think I have a clue that if followed up might lead to something. But for that time is wanted, and to judge from what everybody is saying the time is limited now to a few hours. Every evening I quake to hear the report 'that it is for to-morrow.' I am losing no time, however, and work day and night. I will report more fully on this matter as soon as possible. Just now I am working heaven and earth to get a respite if not a reprieve."

"This looks bad, eh, Schneider?" said Mr. Mundy, laying down the MS. and looking up.

"Yes," said Mr. Schneider, "And this looks much worse," he added, handing the chief a copy of the latest edition of *The Star*, which he had been glancing at while Mr. Mundy was reading.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Mundy. "I don't see."

"There," said Mr. Schneider, "that paragraph that I am pointing to."

"Ah, yes, a Reuter's from Paris," said Mr. Mundy. Then he read out:—"Paris, 6 p.m. I am informed on excellent authority that President Grévy has returned the papers in the Forster case to the Committee of Pardons and refuses to interfere. Orders have accordingly been issued, and it appears certain that the execution will take place to-morrow morning at daybreak, outside the Roquette prison."

"The infernal scoundrels," cried Mr. Mundy, starting to his feet. "Do you mean to say, Mr. Schneider, that they are going to execute an *Informers* reporter?"

"It looks very much like it," said Mr. Schneider, gravely.

Mr. Mundy started to his feet. "Now, if this had

been an American citizen instead of being a Britisher, we could have worked the racket over there as was done in the L—— case, got the President to interfere and created sympathy for our man all over the States, and so have come out well in the end after all. That is the worst of employing Britishers. I wish I had never sent that Forster to Paris."

"I daresay he wishes so, too," said Mr. Schneider, "especially if he has any idea of what is going to happen to him."

"I don't believe him guilty. I don't, indeed," cried the editor, stamping about the room. "It's a shame and a sin."

Mr. Schneider offered no remark until the chief had cooled down. Then he took up a telegraph form and said, as he dipped his pen into the ink: "We must get the execution fully reported, of course. Whom shall we get to cover it?"

"Oh, let that Agatha girl attend to that. She will find someone right enough. And, stay, tell her to send the duplicate of her telegrams here so that we can see how it has gone off. And now I guess I'll go and try and sleep this off. I tell you what, Mr. Schneider," he added, pausing in the doorway. "This will do us a darned lot of mischief in New York."

"That comes from wanting art and letters in the paper," muttered Mr. Schneider, as the chief went downstairs. "I knew that that scheme wasn't worth a cent."

He then sat down to his table, and wrote out the following despatch:—

"Agatha Ouseley, Grand Hôtel, Paris.

"See that Forster's execution is fully covered. Cable five thousand words, if possible, direct; duplicating for London."

Just as this had been sent off, a wire came in from Agatha, confirming the Reuter's in *The Star*. She added that she had seen the lawyer and that there was no hope whatever for the man.

CHAPTER V.

THE GUILLOTINE.

IT just happened that as Agatha received the wire sent her from the London office of the *Informer*, she was standing in the courtyard of the Grand Hôtel conversing with a young man called Postlethwaite, who had come to propose that he should supply her with an account of the execution for the paper, she, as a woman, being of course unable to attend. He had his card for passing the police lines, and seemed very anxious to do the work. Having nobody else at hand, and liking the fellow's look, Agatha deputed him to do the work, bidding him meet her at six o'clock the following morning at the Telegraph office in the Exchange Building, the only one that would be open at that time. She then jumped into a cab and drove off to the Boulevard du Palais, where she found Maître Guérin just starting to go out.

"I suppose that there is absolutely no hope," she cried.

"No, none at all," said the lawyer, gravely. "I begin to feel very sorry. For though I confess that at first I was convinced of this young man's guilt, I begin to doubt it now. His conduct since he has been in prison has been so manly, and so unlike the usual conduct of convicted criminals, that even the warders seem to think that an injustice has been done. He is either a very great hypocrite or a great martyr, and I am now inclined to believe that he is the latter. Unfortunately it is too late

now, not even the President could save him. The orders for the execution have gone out in sextuple copies, and all the arrangements are now being made. I shall see him to-morrow morning, if possible, and try to give him heart."

"Did you give him my message to-day?" asked Agatha.

"Yes; I took him the lock of hair that you sent him, with the message that it came from an English woman who believed in his innocence, and who sympathised with him in his trouble. He was very pleased, poor fellow, and made me describe you to him. I didn't mention your name as you had told me not to, and he didn't ask for it. And, in return, he asked me to give you this spray of lilac, which he picked this morning in his exercise yard. I promised to do so, and here it is. If you hadn't come round to-night I should have sent it to your hôtel. He bade me thank you very much, and assure you that you were not mistaken; that he is innocent, and that if he must die that fact will relieve his death of all its terror. He said his life had been so unhappy a one that he did not really mind dying. It was only that his death was to be such a shameful one that troubled him, but, at least, it was painless, he knew, and quickly over."

"Poor fellow, poor fellow," said Agatha. "Should you see him in the morning, thank him for his lilac, and say that I will always keep it."

"I will," said the barrister; "only I don't think that he will be in much of a state to receive love-messages at such a time."

"It isn't a love-message," cried Agatha. "I am a married woman, and have never seen the man; but I think that this might console him a little."

With this she took her departure, and drove back to her

hôtel. It was then close on midnight, and as she entered the courtyard she met a party of visitors driving out under the guidance of an interpreter, who was telling the coachman to drive to the Place de la Roquette. She went straight up to her room, but found it impossible to go to sleep; and spent the night in fancying the interior of the condemned cell, and wondering what might be the thoughts of the unhappy man. By five o'clock she was up and dressed, and after a hasty *café-au-lait* walked out towards the Place de la Bourse to keep her appointment with Postlethwaite, feeling very sick and tired of the business before her. She shuddered as she thought of what was going on at so short a distance from her, perhaps at that very moment.

Six o'clock struck, and there were no signs of her reporter, and she was just beginning to feel very anxious, as the latest moment for sending off the despatch, so that it could be in the morning paper in New York, was fast approaching, when a cab came tearing down the square towards her. Before it had got up the door opened, and the Englishman jumped out. He was breathless with excitement, and had a quantity of papers in his hand, which he waved in the air. As soon as he could get breath he cried out, "Rush for the office. I follow you." Whilst Agatha was running off she heard him behind her crying out, "There are only two clerks there now. You keep one fully occupied while I keep the other. We have a splendid beat, and there is a whole regiment of newspaper men behind me. Run for your life. Scribble off any damned thing as long as you keep the man occupied until I have got all this through."

"Yes, yes, I understand," cried Agatha,—"Stanley's trick?"

"Yes, yes, yes. Only don't lose a moment. The fellows are close behind me. By jingo, here they are!"

As he spoke three cabs came dashing into the square and a moment later about six reporters rushed jostling each other into the office. But here to their dismay they found both operators fully engaged, one with a young lady who was handing in leaflet after leaflet as fast as the clerk could attend to them, and the other by a young man who was writing for his life so as to keep the pile of manuscript before the clerk undiminished.

"It's no use, boys," said the eldest of the new-comers; "we're beaten, sure. Hang the luck, and such a good story as it is, too. But, never mind, let's try the Central."

So saying, he darted off, followed by most of the others. One or two remained behind to try and get in after the two already in possession. It was mortification of soul for them, however, as the clerks were kept fully busy till past eight, and by that time it was too late to hope for getting any cable through in time to reach New York for the morning paper. As a matter of fact the *Informer* scored wonderfully that morning in New York with a story that created a vast sensation throughout the States. The *World*, it is true, had something about it, but only about half a column; but then the *World* does not often get beaten, and so that did not diminish the glory and kudos that the *Informer* got out of its "scoop."

The following is the exact copy of the cable that led off that morning's *Informer* in New York City. It was printed with about sixteen headlines in various sizes of type, and made the biggest sensation of the year in the way of foreign news:—

"Special Cable Despatch to the *New York Informer*.

"Paris, Sept. 19th, 2 a.m.—Already at midnight the

news had got about the boulevard that this morning, at break of day, the convict Forster was to pay the penalty of the crime of which a French jury had found him guilty. It was the great topic of every supper-room in the capital last night, and hundreds of people of every class hurried out to the Place de la Roquette in the hope of getting a place. By the time I arrived a large crowd was collected at the bottom of the Rue de la Roquette, across the middle of which a strong cordon of police was drawn. Nobody was allowed to pass until his papers had been very carefully examined by the police-officer in charge, but in spite of this precaution there were certainly many afterwards present in proximity to the guillotine who never wrote a line of copy in their lives. By my side most of the time stood a negro waiter from one of the restaurants, and a little way off was a group of foreigners who had been brought to see the sight by an interpreter, who, I understand, charged them four dollars each for the treat. It was not until after much parleying that I was allowed to pass the lines of police but after that all was plain sailing. I immediately made my way to the centre of the large square and took up my position about half-way between the doors of the prison and the fatal five paving stones which mark the place where presently the fatal machine was to be erected. I had some difficulty in elbowing my way to the front, as already at that hour there were seven or eight lines of spectators, presumably pressmen, present. It was then about one o'clock. A few minutes after my arrival there came riding into the square a squadron of cavalry who ranged themselves in three sides of a square round the place of execution. After them followed masses of police-men who formed a treble barrier in front of the horses' heads. The night was a lovely one with

a bright moon shining down on the sinister scene. At this moment the aspect of the doors of the prison was singularly gruesome, with the little wicket ajar and overhead shining through the portcullis-like lattice-work of wood a dull red light. Every now and then a shadow flitted past the door. From far off in the cemetery of Pere-la-chaise a nightingale could be heard trilling brilliantly, but too soon its voice was drowned in the hideous cries and songs of the rabble that was collected on both sides of the square without the police cordons. These made the peaceful night a very inferno and what was most horrible about their most indecent behaviour was that I am assured that these cries can be distinctly heard in the interior of the condemned cell. Meanwhile the crowd of pressmen and favoured visitors was growing denser and denser. I am sure that this morning there must have been at least fifteen hundred people on the square, not to count the thousands that were outside and could see nothing. There were men and women everywhere even on the roofs of the little sheds behind us. The cigar-lights of the men in this position gleamed like glowworms in a summer hedge. There were several reporters on the roof of the sentry-box on either side of the prison door and every tree bowed beneath the weight of a score of eager spectators. At two o'clock a rumbling noise was heard and presently there drove up into the centre of the square two large vans, which were placed quite close to the Roquette gate and directly opposite me. One of these vans was destined to convey the corpse of the executed man to the cemetery and contained a plain deal coffin. The other contained the guillotine and it was in this one that the executioner, Mr. Minger, and his crew of aids had driven up. They jumped out briskly when the van stopped, and began forthwith to unload it of its sinister cargo. I was much surprised to see that these

men were all most elegantly dressed in frock-coats and top-hats, which, however, they presently changed for blue blouses and caps before proceeding to their work. Minger, the chief-executioner, did not follow their example but remained attired in his greasy black overcoat and black hat. He kept walking about stealthily rubbing his hands with a nervous gesture. It was horrid to see the business-like way in which the aids now proceeded to unpack the different pieces of the guillotine. It was like some friendly household removal, where some workman or poor clerk has called in his friends to give him a helping hand. The whole thing was done with so much briskness and pleasantness. The guillotine is a beautiful little machine, and its construction is a most delicate one. It was pieced together with all the careful precision that a watchmaker employs in setting a watch together. Each piece was most carefully examined before being put into place, and every now and then Minger would take a step backwards to see if it looked straight and level. The whole mounting of it did not take more than half-an-hour, and at the end of that time the knife was hoisted up into its place. Seen thus, there was nothing formidable about the death-dealing engine. Certainly the dull blood-red colour of the uprights has a sinister effect in the night, but, apart from that, I did not see anything formidable in its appearance. I had always thought it a much more imposing concern. But when the executioner began testing the working of the knife, now letting the catch go so that it fell as it would presently fall, dealing death, it certainly was sickening. I do not know of any sound that is more horrible or more chills one's blood than that sharp hiss, followed by the deathly thud. Time after time he tried it to see that all would work well when the morning

came. After he had done so for the last time, I heard him say to one of his aids: 'Yes, I think that she will do her work neatly this time.' Almost directly afterwards the same aid said something about the catch being not quite straight, and afterwards, when Mr. Minger had gone behind one of the vans, this man approached the guillotine and did something to the knife. At about three o'clock two cabs drove up. Out of one of them alighted a priest, the Abbé Faure, a delightful old man with the kindest of faces. He has assisted many scores of criminals in the last anguish of that fatal morning. It appears that Forster, although presumably a Protestant, refused to see any other minister but the prison-chaplain, who is, of course, a Roman Catholic. The Abbé immediately entered the prison. The other cab contained the Procureur of the Republic and another official, who wore a tri-colour sash round his waist and looked very important. The time was now drawing near when the convict should be waked. The noise was dreadful, what with the loud chatter of the men around me, the neighing of the horses in the cool morning air, and the revolting shouting and songs of the rabble far off. I never saw more indifference and more heartlessness than amongst this crowd, and the worst and most cynical were my *confrères*. At four o'clock a detachment of infantry was marched up, and, to our extreme disgust, was placed just in front of us in the front row, hiding the guillotine from our eyes. A young socialist reporter, however, who was standing next to me, immediately appealed to the aforementioned official with the tri-colour sash round his waist, and said: 'This is meant to serve as an example to us. How can it be an example if you hide the sight from us?' This and other protestations, in which I joined, effected the withdrawal of the troops, most of

whom, I am sure, were glad to be relieved of the duty. In the place of them some of the warders from the prison were brought out and arranged round the guillotine. I afterwards heard that this precaution was taken because it was thought that Forster, being considered a desperate man, might offer some resistance. At a little before four, I saw the various officials collect together outside the prison-door, and, preceded by the hideous Minger still rubbing his hands, abjectly enter the gaol. The wicket was slammed to behind them, and a great sigh went up from all around. 'They are going to wake him,' said the socialist at my side. 'It won't be long now.' A period of anguishing silence now ensued, while the pale light of dawn stealing up showed the blanched faces of those who had been waiting all night, some pale with fatigue, others with suppressed anguish and disgust. In the centre stood the hungry guillotine, reaching her blood-red arms heavenwards. A few pale stars were gleaming in the steel-blue sky, and behind the prison was seen the flush of dawn. Little birds sang to welcome the coming day, and the horses of the troops and in the vans neighed with pleasure of the delicious air. A new day was dawning—for all but one.

Meanwhile, within the prison the mournful procession was making its silent way towards the condemned cell. The director of the prison entered first, followed by the executioner, his aids, the commissary of police, and other officials. They found Forster lying fast asleep on his bed. The director of the prison stepped forward and touched him on his shoulder, and shook him gently. Forster started up, surprised to see so many people in his cell. It was some time before he seemed to recollect where he was. Then the director said: 'You must have courage, Forster. Your appeal for a revision of your trial has been rejected,

and the president has refused to exercise clemency in your case. You must prepare to die.' At the same time the warders helped him out of bed and began to assist him to dress. 'Oh, you needn't trouble,' said Forster. 'I can dress myself.' Whilst he was putting on his boots he had a moment of revolt, and cried out: 'What a cruel injustice you are doing me! I am innocent of this crime. Anybody that knows me could tell you that I am incapable of a cowardly crime like that.' Just then the Abbé stepped forward and whispered in his ear, bidding him resign himself to the inevitable, and, at the same time, offered him some rum in a tin goblet. Forster refused this, saying that if he must die he had no need of Dutch courage. The procession then formed, and made its way through long corridors and through various wards towards the outer office. Here Forster was made to sit down on a stool. Minger then approached him, and, taking a small pair of scissors out of his pocket, cut away the collar of his shirt and trimmed the ends of his hair. He then passed him over to his aids, who pinioned both arms and legs whilst the chief signed on the registry of the prison a formal receipt for the body of the prisoner. At last all was ready, and the Abbé having again asked Forster if he had anything to say to him, and being answered in the negative, a start was made for the place of execution. In front walked the executioner, with an absurd affectation of dignity, immediately followed by Forster, supported by one of the aids on one side and by the good old priest on the other. All along the terrible walk the Abbé did not cease to pour comfort into the prisoner's ear, but I fancy that the unhappy man was too terrified at his approaching fate to pay much attention to him. Outside we were growing impatient, and the cries were again beginning to make themselves heard, when a

man, who had been looking through a spyhole in the prison-door, made a sign, and the whisper ran round, 'They are coming.' The next minute, amidst a deadly silence, the doors of the prison were thrown open, and the procession appeared. Out flashed the swords of the soldiery with a clang and a clatter, and off went the hats of everybody present. Only a few suppressed cries were heard, and behind me a man fell to the ground in a faint, from too much emotion. Forster walked bravely forward. His face was ashen pale, and the perspiration trickled in large drops down his cheeks. His first glance had been for the knife that gleamed in the air before him, and then he turned his head away towards the side on which I was standing. As he passed me I heard him mutter something, but what it was I cannot say. The few yards' distance that separates the guillotine from the prison-doors was soon passed, and then a halt was made. The Abbé, who all the time had been holding the crucifix high up in the air so as to conceal as best he could the sight of the instrument of death, now threw his arms round the prisoner's neck and kissed him twice, once on each cheek, and with a supreme exhortation turned away with both hands pressed to his ears, and in violent emotion hurried away to his cab. The aid then tore the coat that was resting on Forster's shoulders away, and at the same time gave him a violent push forward, so that he stumbled against the upright plank before him. The plank, giving way under his weight, revolved on its axis, and thus brought Forster to a horizontal position. Meanwhile, one of the aids had stepped round to the front, and, reaching out his arms, caught hold of the convict's ears, and began to drag him forward, while the other aid pushed him from behind. There was the usual resistance on the prisoner's

part, but he was soon dragged into position under the knife. The wooden collar was then slammed down over his neck, and, at the same time the aids stepped back to allow Minger, who was standing with his hand on the string, to pull back the catch and bring down the knife. I saw the man raise his arm, and step a pace back, as he gave a violent downward tug. Involuntarily I closed my eyes, shuddering with the anticipation of hearing the sickening thud of the knife, and splash of the spurting blood.

“But just then a terrible and unexpected thing happened.

“Minger, seizing the cord, had tugged it downwards with the professional jerk that usually was sufficient to release the heavy knife from the clip-shaped catch and to bring it down between the grooves of the uprights on to the convict's neck. This time, however, to the dismay of the executioner, and to the horror of every man who was present in that mighty throng, the catch refused to work in response to the pull. Minger tugged and tugged, deadly pale in the face with dismay and terror. But evidently there was something wrong with the machinery, for in spite of all his endeavours he was unable to make it work. At last he reeled back from the guillotine while one of his aids rushing up in his turn laid his hand on the cord and pulled. Meanwhile I could distinctly hear the unhappy Forster muttering, ‘Oh, have done with it. Finish! finish!’ Suddenly the aid, giving a violent tug, snapped the rope in two, and went stumbling back with the end in his hand, knocking up against one of the prison-warders, who in disgust pushed him back so that he fell forward on his face sprawling. Meanwhile Minger had recovered from his emotion, and coming forward cried out for a ladder.

'There is something wrong with the catch,' he explained; 'I shall get it all right in a moment or two.' But the crowd would not allow this torture to proceed. All the while that the above events had been in progress the cries of disgust and anger of all present had been making themselves more loud; and just as the cord broke in the executioner's hand, the young socialist reporter who had been standing by my side, suddenly jumped forward and cried out, 'This abominable butchery shall not go on. This is not justice. To the rescue, brothers! Let us loot the guillotine!' In response to his appeal a loud cheer went up from the crowd, and several men sprung forward to stand by him. They were just beginning to lay violent hands on the guillotine, when the officer in command of the troops ran up, and pushing himself between the socialist and the executioner, who were beginning to grapple with each other, cried out, 'This shall not go on. I shall see that this man is taken back to the prison, and that a statement of what has happened is sent off at once to the President. But you, gentlemen, get back to your places, and let there be no violence or I shall be forced to do my duty.'

"At the same time the governor of the gaol came up and gave a command to some of the warders who were standing by. He was very pale and trembled violently. 'I never saw a more shameful thing in my life,' I heard him say to the officer commanding the troops. 'It makes me blush for the uniform that I wear. I will take the consequences on myself. Nobody can blame us for putting a stop to this abominable scandal.'

"A hurried conference, carried on *sotto voce*, ensued between the two officers, whilst the hangman and his aids struggled with the crowd round the guillotine to get at

their prey. However, the people were too strong for them, and whilst some kept Minger and his crew back, others unfastened Forster from his position on the plank and released his head from the fatal collar. Just as this was done the governor of the gaol came up and gave orders that the prisoner should be taken back to his cell at once, pending that a full report of what had happened had been sent to President Grévy. This order was immediately carried into effect. Forster was quite unconscious as he was carried back. No sooner had he disappeared inside the prison walls, than I sprang into a cab and dashed off to the telegraph office. Further particulars will follow for evening editions."

The first evening edition of the *Informer* came out that day at eleven o'clock, and was eagerly bought up by the people of New York. A clever artist had been put to work and on the front page, on which the gist of the above telegram was reproduced from the morning edition, was given a cut representing the tragic scene described. The following further intelligence was also given:—

"Paris, 11 a.m.—No sooner had the military withdrawn, called off by the officers, than a determined attempt was made by the mob, headed by the socialist reporter to whom I alluded, to lynch Minger and his aids. These only owed their safety to their precipitate flight into the prison, where shelter was given them in one of the vacant cells. The disgusting and painful scene described has created the greatest horror and dismay in Paris and is the topic of all conversation. The whole matter is now under the consideration of the President, who is described as being completely horrified at what has occurred. I hear, however, that he is not at all decided as to whether it lies in his power to grant a reprieve after the prisoner has been

handed over to the hangman, and at present things look very badly for the prisoner.

"Paris, noon.—I have just returned from the Roquette prison. The guillotine is still standing and is surrounded by a very large police force. All the neighbouring streets are blocked by the crowd, howling death on the executioners. Minger, I hear, has been able to make good his escape from the prison, and is at present conferring with the Minister of Justice. I am told that Forster has now quite recovered, but that he is in a pitiful state, as well he may be. The general opinion at the gaol is that he will be executed to-morrow morning."

As the news kept coming in from Paris the *Informer* brought out successive evening editions, which continued till late at night. The following are some of the more important items of news, on this sensational event, that were published that day.

"Paris, 4 p.m.—It has just transpired that the reason why the guillotine would not work this morning was that some one had inserted between the right edge of the blade and the groove, in which the knife descends, a long nail. It is said to be the work of the second assistant, who is known to be on the very worst terms with his employer. I was present when this discovery was made, and saw that immediately the nail was removed the machine worked perfectly. You will remember, in my despatch of this morning, I mentioned that after Minger had tried the machine for the last time the assistant in question came up and meddled with it. It was doubtless at that time the nail was inserted. All the evening papers are publishing the most sensational accounts of the occurrence, and the general opinion is that the President should show clemency to the prisoner. A conference is even now taking place at

the Elysée Palace between the President, the Minister of Justice, and the prisoner's advocate.

"Paris, 5 p.m.—A determined attempt has just been made by the crowd to wreck the guillotine. Two very nasty police charges were made, and several of the rioters were severely wounded. In consequence of this occurrence instructions have been given for the dismounting of the fatal machine. This looks better for Forster.

"Paris, 7 p.m.—The decision of the President has just become known. Forster's sentence has been commuted to one of transportation for life. Minger has been discharged, and the assistant, who was the cause of this scandal, has been arrested, and will be proceeded against. The effect of these announcements has been excellent, and almost without exception is the action of the President applauded. Only a few of the Opposition papers comment on what they call the deplorable weakness of the Government; but it is evident that these complaints are not sincere. I hear that Forster fainted on hearing the commutation of his sentence, I am told that he has been in a terrible state of nervous depression all day. The prison doctor thinks that it is not at all improbable that brain fever will set in before the morrow.

"Paris, 10 p.m.—The crowd has dispersed, and everything is quiet again. Forster has got to sleep quietly, and seems to run no risk of further consequences."

As a matter of fact, in spite of the terrible shock that he had undergone, the unhappy young Englishman, thanks to his magnificent constitution, pulled through all right after a few days' rest in the Roquette infirmary. At the lapse of that time a gang of convicts being sent off to Toulon, he was sent with them, and after waiting some weeks at that convict station was shipped on board the

convoy, and in due time, after terrible sufferings and privations, was landed at Nouméa, the French convict station in the island of New Caledonia, where he was at once placed among convicts of the fourth or worst class. It is here we leave him, broken-hearted and desperate.

CHAPTER VI.

AGATHA'S CLUE.

TO return to Agatha Ouseley, whom we left at the telegraph station on the morning of the execution.

On the evening of that day, just as she was sitting down to dinner at the Grand Hotel, having left the English reporter to attend to the news-gathering on the execution story, she received a telegram from Mr. Mundy, bidding her call on him the next day at the Chatham Hotel, and adding much praise for the way in which the *Informer* had been served over that morning's event, the account of which had been telegraphed to him from the New York office. A little later she also received a letter from London from her husband, which upset her a good deal, and brought the tears to her eyes.

Punctually at eleven o'clock next morning she called at the Chatham Hotel, and on mentioning her name was at once shown up to Mr. Mundy's apartment. The editor welcomed her warmly, and thanked her very cordially for the good service that she had been able to secure for the journal.

"We beat every paper in New York City," he said, "and came out magnificently in the end. Our man doesn't get executed after all; Providence interferes at the last moment—the cruel knife will not descend on the neck of the innocent *Informer* reporter. It is, I declare, one of the best stories that we have had yet to deal with, and I can imagine how the hearts of all the boys leapt for joy as that

stuff came reeling in. But that is not the question; and what I particularly want to speak to you about is this. Now that Forster has been reprieved, you have plenty of time before you to go ahead on the assignment we put you on. You told us in your letter that you had got a clue of some sort, and that you only needed a little time to follow it up. You have now all the time that you want, and all you have to do is to go ahead like lightning. You shall have all the money you need, and any assistance that you may require. But before we talk about that, you will please to tell me what your clue is. I shall be able to tell you if it is worth anything or not."

"I told you," said Agatha, "that my first step was to get a list of all the people who were in the habit of visiting the man Lafargue, and that I investigated each separate case with particular care. Well, in the course of these investigations I came upon the trace of one man who had been connected with the usurer, and who disappeared just after the murder, under circumstances just as suspicious as, if not more so than, Forster. This man was a kind of loafer, living nobody knew how, and always in the very worst circumstances. On the morrow of the murder, he was seen to be abundantly provided with money, and almost directly afterwards he disappeared from Paris, and has never been heard of since. These circumstances appear to have been very well known to the police, but these having made up their minds that Forster was the guilty party, paid little or no attention to them, suspicious as they were."

"And what was the name of this man?" asked Mr. Mundy, deeply interested.

"Ah! that's just it," answered Agatha. "That I am unable to say definitely. He was registered only as 'W' on the books of the old man, and at the address given,

where they perfectly well remembered him, they had forgotten his exact name. All that they could tell me was, that it was something like Wisnol or Wisson."

"Did they tell you what nationality he was?" asked Mundy.

"They did not know. They thought he was an Englishman, but were not certain. He used to be known as 'the Englishman' in the quarter."

"Wisnol—Wisson," repeated Mr. Mundy, "those don't sound like English names. Are you sure it was not Wilson?"

"I thought of that name at once, and asked the people if it was not Wilson; but they said they couldn't remember, but thought it was more Wisson or Wisnol than Wilson."

"Had they any idea where this individual had gone to?"

"Yes, they seemed to think that he had gone to America. They told me that he was always saying that as soon as he got any money he should go to America, as the only place where a man could still make his fortune. It was the general opinion in the quarter that he is in the States?"

"Did they tell you what kind of a man he was, his age, and so forth?"

"They did not know his age, but spoke about him as a youngish man. As to his description, you know what common people are and how limited is their power of expression. I had ten different descriptions from ten different people that had seen him."

"And do you think seriously that there is any probability of his being the real murderer of the man Lafargue?"

"There is just as much evidence against him, as far as I can see, barring the possession of the brooch, as was brought against our poor Forster. He is known to have been in very bad circumstances at the time of the crime,

and to have been seen with a large sum of money in his possession immediately after it. Also within a few hours of its becoming known he disappeared, and has not been heard of since. I really think that his case ought to be investigated."

"And so do I. And all the more so that I see in this what may perhaps be one of the most thrilling, exciting stories that has ever been brought to light by a newspaper. You have heard me speak of the search that is being carried on in the States by the *Informer* reporter after a man named Wilson, the missing son of the Earl of Brookshire. Suppose, Agatha, suppose that this Wilson and the Wilson we are looking for are one and the same, and just think of the interest involved, and the hit that the *Informer* would make in putting the story before the public in the proper manner. It makes my mouth water to think of it."

Then after a moment's silence, Mr. Mundy added very quietly, "Well, I guess, Agatha, you will have to pack up your traps and get over to America. As this is your assignment you shall carry it out. I shall send you to America and your work will be to find this Wilson, or Wisson, or whatever his name will be. It's a grand bit of work for an intelligent reporter, and there are hundreds of men and women in the States who would give their eyes and their ears to have the chance. But as you have been on this business from the outset it would not be fair to give it to anybody else, and you shall keep it. Only do your best, for as I have told you it is one of the best things that the *Informer* has yet engaged upon. Well, what do you say?" he added, looking rather surprised at Agatha's silence.

"It is very kind of you to think of me and to show your confidence in me in that way, Mr. Mundy," said the young

woman, "and I am sure I am very grateful to you for it. But I cannot accept this work."

"And why not?" asked Mr. Mundy.

"I am not my own mistress," replied Agatha. "You know, I think, that I am married. My husband is an invalid and it is impossible for me to leave him. Besides, there is my child, my little daughter. But it is my husband that prevents me from accepting your kind offer. I had a letter from him yesterday, just after your telegram came and he wrote most unhappily to say that if I did not come home soon he should kill himself. I cannot forget my duty, Mr. Mundy, and so it will be impossible for me to do what you ask."

"What business has a newspaper woman to go and get married?" cried Mr. Mundy, indignantly. "I never saw such a good chance of distinguishing herself thrown away. But, stuff and nonsense, Agatha, you are not in earnest in refusing this offer, I am sure. Why, think, it is your fortune! You remain on salary at the same rate as heretofore all the time you are engaged on this assignment, and should you succeed in hunting this fellow down and convicting him of being the murderer of the man Lafargue, you get a cheque for ten thousand dollars, besides the glory. And should the man turn out to be the missing heir of the Earl of Brookshire and the missing murderer at the same time, I will give you a cheque for twenty thousand dollars. Besides that you could publish a book on 'How I caught Wilson, the Murderer,' which would sell like hot cakes all over the States, to say nothing of what you could make by lecturing on the same subject."

"Oh, I quite see what I throw away," cried Agatha, "but it is just impossible for me to accept your offer, brilliant as it is. If it were not for my husband I would

go to-night, and I am sure I should enjoy the work immensely. But I cannot forget I am Philip Ouseley's wife, and that my duty is towards him; he is ill and lonely and needs me, and I cannot desert him for no matter what gain."

"But couldn't you take him with you?"

"Oh, no, he is too ill for travelling. I am really very sorry," she added, seeing how clouded the face of the editor was growing, "and wish that I could do what you want, but, under the circumstances, it is quite impossible."

"Well, then," said Mr. Mundy, briefly, "there is nothing more to be said about it. The assignment shall be given to somebody else, that is all, and so much the worse for you, because no such chance will ever come your way again, you may be certain. I shall give the work to one of my New York men. By the way, when do you want to return home?"

"As soon as possible," said Agatha.

"Very well. You must not, however, forget that you are engaged to us for another two weeks at least. I don't want you to stay here against your will, and have no objection to your going home, but I shall expect you to supply me in writing with the very fullest details of all you know about this man Wilson, so that when the reporter I am going to cable for comes over he will know on what to set to work. Your present salary will be paid to you up to the end of next week, and all we shall want of you will be that document that I ask you for."

"I suppose," said Agatha, as she rose to leave the room, "that after that I shall be allowed to resume my former contributions to the *Informer*?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Mundy. "You will have to ask Mr. Schneider about that. As a rule at the *Informer*

office when a reporter refuses an assignment, we don't care to give him another."

"Well, I am very sorry to appear to desert you," said Agatha, as she left the room, "but I can't help my duty."

Mr. Mundy walked to the door with her, and as she was going down the stairs he cried out: "Remember that there is a cheque for twenty thousand dollars for the person who arrests the man Wisnol, and can prove that he is the real author of the crime for which Forster was sentenced to death."

CHAPTER VII:

AGATHA'S LODGER.

ABOUT two years after the events related in the last chapter, Agatha Ouseley was living in great distress in a little house in Upper Norwood. Her little daughter had died and her husband continued to ail sadly. It was for the sake of his health that she had moved down to that suburb. Her affairs were in a very bad state. Her engagement with the *Informer* had not been renewed, which she attributed rightly to the anger that Mr. Mundy had felt at her having deserted him at a most critical moment. The little literary work that remained to her was of the very lowest and most ill-remunerated kind, being hackwork for some of the minor magazines, which brought her in about 30s. a-week for work which occupied her most of her days, and almost the whole of her nights. In order to eke out her small means she had taken to letting the lower rooms of her little house, which she had furnished as a bedroom and a sitting-room; but she was never able to keep her lodgers for any length of time, her husband's incessant coughing, and the violent scenes that he used to make at all hours of the day and night, driving away even the most patient of her guests.

That evening—it was a winter's evening in the month of January—she was feeling particularly miserable. She had just received a very sharp letter from one of the publishing firms for whom she slaved, sending her, instead of the small cheque which she had been anxiously expecting, a quantity

of her manuscript, with the request that she would in future be more careful. There was no money in the house. Philip's medicine bottles wanted renewing, and the larder was empty. The rooms had been unlet for several weeks, and there was no prospect of any income from that source for a long time to come. There was no credit to be had anywhere, and the position was altogether a desperate one. Agatha had just returned from a painful interview with her husband, who, with all the peevish injustice of a confirmed invalid, had been blaming her for the misery of the situation, and was sitting in the kitchen preparing to begin anew her nightly slavery over the white pages of her paper, when the little girl who helped her in the house came down stairs, bringing with her a newspaper which had come by the post, and which she had found in the box.

Agatha tore off the cover, and saw that it was a copy of the *New York Informer*, one of the last that had reached Europe by that morning's mail. At the top of the first column, on the first page, was a large cross, made in blue pencil.

Turning to the column thus indicated, Agatha read :—

“CAN THIS BE FORSTER ???

“THE CURIOUS STORY OF A NOBLEMAN'S BOATSWAIN.

“THE MYSTERIOUS CASTAWAY.

“HOW AN ENGLISH LORD TOOK ON BOARD HIS MAGNIFICENTLY-APPOINTED YACHT A WANDERER
ON THE HIGH SEAS.

“HE WAS ACCOMMODATED IN HIS LORDSHIP'S CABIN.

“CURIOUS SCENES BETWEEN THE VAGABOND AND THE
NOBLE LORD.

“THE SUSPICIONS OF THE CREW.

“*The date of the picking up of the castaway tallies in a remarkable manner with the escape of Forster from the French penal settlement.*”

("SPECIAL TO THE *New York Informer*.")

"San Francisco.—It will be remembered that some weeks ago cable news reached New York *viâ* San Francisco to the effect that the notorious convict Forster had been able to effect his escape from Nouméa, presumably by the connivance of one of the black warders, whom he had ingratiated by saving his life on an occasion when he was attacked by two desperate ruffians of the gang to which Forster was attached. It was thought at the time that the unhappy youth had lost his life at sea—a conclusion all the more rational when it was known that he had set out in a small open boat, and had taken no provisions of any kind with him. To-day, however, a story has come to the knowledge of the *Informer* correspondent which may possibly indicate that the man Forster was picked up at sea, and is now in safety in some part of the U.S.A. territory.

"A few days ago a reporter came into the bureau of the *Informer* in this city and said that a sailor, recently discharged for drunkenness from the yacht of Lord Brookshire, the well-known millionaire and land-owner, was telling a very curious story to anybody that cared to listen to him. He was at once invited to hunt the man up and to bring him, alive or dead, to the *Informer* office. He has just been here, and the following is his story:—About three months ago I was employed on the yacht of Lord Brookshire, which at that time was cruising in the South Pacific. One day, when the ship was at about one hundred miles distance from New Caledonia, and at about half-past twelve in the afternoon, an open boat was sighted drifting in the open sea. His lordship, who happened to be on deck, suggested that, although it appeared to be empty, it would be well to get alongside of it, for he said: 'Who knows but

what it may contain one of those wretched French convicts.' Our captain said that French convicts were a rubbishy lot, and that it was a pity to go out of the way to help one. But my lord insisted, and a boat was put out and way made for the castaway. Right enough, when we came alongside of it we saw, lying in the bottom of the boat and half-drowned in the bilgewater, the rummiest-looking object that you ever saw. We hauled him into our boat and rowed him back to the *Clarissa*. My lord was as delighted as if it had been some rare curiosity that we had brought back, and bade the ship's surgeon see to the man at once. Whilst he was giving these instructions and was bending over the corpse-like body of the castaway, we see'd him turn pale, like the other was, and stagger back. He recovered, however, at once, and, bidding the surgeon do his best to restore Mr. Joker to life and comfort, walked away to his cabin. Well, Mr. Joker turned out to be no Frenchman after all, but an English lad to judge from his accent when on awaking he called for his mother. She couldn't be produced, sure enough, but every other comfort that could be afforded by one of the best-appointed yachts afloat was provided. Presently my lord's orders came forward to say that this ragamuffin was to be brought to my lord's cabin and to be put to bed in one of the state-rooms. This did not surprise us, because we knew that my lord was what you call here a 'bit of a crank,' and this was by no means the first time he had done funny things of that description. But what did surprise us was that, in spite of the fact that after two days the surgeon reported his patient as right as a trivet, that young man never made his appearance on deck again during the whole remaining part of the voyage, which, I should mention, was completely changed from what had been the former plans, after he came on

board. Our destination had been Melbourne and Sydney, but after touching at Melbourne, and remaining there just long enough to take in coal and provisions, we set off on to the high seas again and sailed for San Francisco. Well, as I say, during all that time not so much as the tip of Mr. Joker's nose did we get to see. Of course this made us all talk a good deal in the fore-cabin, and all the more so that we had all noticed how completely my lord had changed since he had got this stranger on board. He was usually a very gay sort of man, but now he was quite queer, and used to go about the deck blubbering to himself for nights in the queerest fashion. This interested me a good deal; and one night I thought that I would take a peep as to what went forward in the cabin aft, and so, watching my opportunity, I sneaked aft and down the stairs against the door of the state-room. It wasn't much I heard, because the two were talking in a foreign language, but I did hear the sound of kisses, that I will swear to. And looking through the key-hole I saw that my lord was sitting with his arm round Mr. Joker's neck, who was sprawling on the sofa as much at home as if he had been my lord himself, with a huge cigar between his lips and the best part of a bottle of champagne before him on the table. Well, that is the last I saw of this curious cuss, because two days later, after we had anchored in San Francisco harbour, it went about the ship that the previous night, whilst most of us were on shore, the dingey had been rowed off by my lord and the captain and that Mr. Joker had gone with them. My lord and the captain came back alone, and since then nothing further was heard or seen of the young gentleman. Some weeks after that occurrence, my lord thought fit to give me the sack from his yacht for being a bit tight, and so I don't see why I should keep this here on my conscience any longer.

It's the truth, and I'll swear to it ; and when the *Clarissa* next comes here you can ask any one of the mates aboard whether I have been a lying to you or not."

Agatha had read so far when the slavey came running into the kitchen to announce that the butcher, to whom a pretty large account was owing, was at the back door and was clamouring for his money. Agatha, frightened lest the man's noise should wake her husband, threw down her paper and went out to speak to him. He was very rude, and went away threatening to sell the house over her head. As she turned away from the door, the thought of what she had just been reading came into her mind, and with it the recollection of the splendid reward offered by Mr. Mundy for the capture of the man Wisson or Wisnol.

"Ah !" she cried, as she thought of the misery that she was surrounded by, and the change that twenty thousand dollars would make in her life. "Ah, if only I could come face to face with that man."

At that moment a loud knock came at the front door.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. WILSON AND HIS STRANGE CONDUCT.

THE little girl was in the passage, and it was she who opened the door to this late caller. When Agatha had recovered from the effect of the knock coming just in answer to her exclamation—a simple coincidence, of course, but none the less a curious one—and had run upstairs into the hall, she found the servant parleying with a tall, gentlemanly-looking man, who had a rug and bag in his hand and looked as if he had just come from a railway journey.

“What does this gentleman want?” asked Agatha, stepping forward.

“It is very late to disturb you, I know,” said the stranger, saluting; “but I am so anxious to get settled down and to have rest, that I came on here at once, instead of waiting till the morning. It is the Queen’s Hotel,” he continued, holding out a card, “the manager, at least, that recommended me to come here. I am in want of comfortable lodgings, and they told me that I could very possibly be suited here.”

“Certainly, certainly,” said Agatha, feeling very happy. “Won’t you come in. I can’t say that the lodgings are very, very comfortable, because I wasn’t able to buy all the furniture that I should have liked to put into the rooms. Well, this, you see, is the sitting-room, and this is the bedroom with the folding doors in between. The price is fourteen shillings a week for the two.”

"Yes, I know," said the stranger, "forty shillings a week for the two. So the manager at the Queen's told me. Very cheap, I should say. Well, I'll take them, and, I tell you what, I'll come into them at once if you see no objection. My name's Wilson, Wilson, and I come from the States. Why, how the little lady stares. Common enough name that, Wilson, ain't it? I'll take the rooms for a month, and in order to prevent any uneasiness that you might feel, will pay you the month's rent in advance. Let's see, four times forty is one hundred and sixty. Well, here's a ten-pound note."

"You make a mistake, sir," said Agatha. "The rent's fourteen not forty shillings. If you pay me the month in advance, and it's kind and considerate of you to do so, it's only fifty-six shillings that I have to take out of this."

"Oh, well," said the stranger, "keep the rest against my board-bill; I shall want most of my grub here. I suppose that you can let me have it, and I may as well pay for it now as later. If there is anything over at the end you can give it to me. Anyway, I would rather you kept it for me than to have it loose in my pocket. Is that settled?"

"Nothing could be more satisfactory, I am sure. Shall I send the girl round for your luggage?"

"Round where?" asked Mr. Wilson.

"Oh, to the hotel, I suppose—to the Queen's."

"I haven't any luggage but what I hold in my hand. I suppose that I can get all I want here in this town, can't I? Strikes you as queer, doesn't it, my turning up like this, without any kit; but that's why I asked you to take payment in advance."

"Oh, I know it's all right," said Agatha. "But excuse me, sir, before I let you these rooms I must tell you of a

great drawback attaching to them. My husband is an invalid."

"Is he? Nothing catching, I suppose?"

"No, it's his cough. Poor fellow, he coughs all day and sometimes all night. It's very disturbing for lodgers, and I think I ought to ask you whether you object to it."

"No, he may cough away as long as he likes for all I care, as long as it isn't with my lungs," said Mr. Wilson with a laugh. Then he added, "I beg your pardon for speaking like that. I am an unmannerly brute. What I mean to say is, that I really don't mind. I am a very sound sleeper. Well, is it settled now, and can I take possession of my rooms? I shall want the fire lighted, and I shall want some supper. What could you give me? I don't want to give you any trouble."

"Are you very particular?"

"Particular? I should say not, seeing where I come from. Give me some tea, and the good old eggs and bacon of suburban lodgings. With that and a pot of marmalade I shall be able to enjoy myself thoroughly. It isn't giving you too much trouble, is it?"

"You shall have it at once," said Agatha, kneeling down and beginning to light the fire.

"Whilst you do that, I will tidy up a little," said Mr. Wilson. "I say, there is some litter in this vase on the mantelpiece. Can I throw it away?"

"Stop!" cried Agatha, looking up. "That isn't rubbish. That is a dried spray of lilac, to which I hold more than to anything else that I have. It is a memento. I will tell you of what some day. I will take it away as soon as I have done with the fire, as you think it makes the room untidy."

As soon as the fire was blazing, Agatha ran upstairs to

her husband's bedroom, and finding him awake told him of her good fortune, and asked him what she could get for him. He gave her a whole string of orders, and she at once set out to procure what was wanted as well as to pay some of the most pressing of her debts. When she returned she at once set about making her lodger's supper, and, when it was ready, took it up on a tray to the sitting-room. There was no answer when she knocked at the door, and thinking that he might have gone out for a stroll, she pushed the door open and walked in with the tray in her hand. She saw Mr. Wilson lying asleep, with his head resting on the table, and his arms spread out over it. She put the tray down on the chiffonier, and touched him lightly on the shoulder, crying: "Wake up, Mr. Wilson, I have brought you your tea." As he made no sign of waking she then shook him gently, repeating her words. Suddenly he awoke, and with a wild cry started to his feet, staring about him like a madman and waving his hands wildly in the air. Agatha, very frightened, started back.

"What have I done?" he cried. "What have I done? I have done nothing—nothing I tell you! Why do you persecute me like that?"

"It's only I," said Agatha. "It's I, Mr. Wilson. I suppose you have been having an unpleasant dream. I can imagine that, seeing how you were lying. Well, here's your tea. It will soon set you to rights again."

"Oh, ah, yes," said Mr. Wilson looking round. "I—I—I remember now. Yes, I had been having a beastly dream," he added, with a haggard look. "But that will be all right soon. Won't you stay with me while I eat," he said pitifully. "I feel very lonely and very unhappy to-night, and would like to talk to you."

"Oh, I am not very good company," said Agatha. "I have had all my liveliness worried out of me."

"Oh, that I am sure you haven't. Sit down there and tell me about that lilac spray and its story. I am really very curious to know about it."

"It's a horrible story," said Agatha, lowering her voice, "and I do not like speaking about it in this house because my husband knows nothing of it. He is a very nervous man, and anything of the horrible order always upsets him dreadfully. He never knew what I went to Paris for."

"Oh, you have been in Paris?" asked Mr. Wilson.

"Yes; it was in Paris that that spray of lilac was given me." Agatha then bent forward, and in a low voice proceeded to relate the story of her "assignment" in general outline. At the end she added, "I do not know of anything in my life that gave me greater pleasure than the marvellous escape of that poor fellow from death, though it is a question whether such a salvation was not worse than the death itself. I don't know how it is, but, although I have never met the man and never once set eyes on him, I have always felt a deep sympathy for him. Perhaps it is because I knew that he was very unhappy and that I am unhappy, too."

Wilson made no remark for some time, but went on with his meal. When he had finished he said, "So you have quite given up investigations?"

"I have been forced to," said Agatha. "I have my husband to look after, and I haven't the time. Oh, if I could only come face to face with the real murderer of Pierre Lafargue!"

Wilson gave her a searching look. Then, he said as he slightly curled his lip, "Don't you think it very undignified for a woman to play the part of a detective. Isn't it a

mean thing? Can't that be left to the police? Why should you turn purveyoress to the gallows?"

"Oh, that is the stupid old-fashioned old-world prejudice about the matter. The prejudice that exists against the police dates from when the police was the king's army of oppression, and when justice was the king's justice and spelt oppression in the eyes of the people. If you will take the trouble to think, you will discover that it is in the most monarchical countries that the contempt, that is the hatred, for the police is the strongest."

"But France—a republic?"

"France has the souvenir of ten centuries of monarchy upon her. Look at Russia and Italy and Spain. Now in democratic countries like England and like America the people know that justice is theirs, and there is little or none of that hatred and contempt for the agents of justice. Why, in America it is part of every newspaper's programme to assist the authorities in dragging criminals to light, and in many notable cases of late in the States such papers as the *Informer* and the *World* did, by means of their reporters, what the paid detectives were unable to accomplish. That is the American notion of public service and the duty of journalism. I consider that if I could bring the murderer of Pierre Lafargue to light I should be doing a great piece of public service, and should be very proud of my success."

"Well, at present, at any rate, that individual, whoever he may be, runs no very great risk from your side," muttered Mr. Wilson.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you," added Agatha, "just before you came in I was reading a paper from New York which contained an extraordinary story. I will run down and fetch it you. It appears that there is some chance that Forster, the man I have been telling you about, managed

to escape and is free. It is the most curious thing I ever read. Shall I fetch it for you?"

"No," said Wilson, "I am not very interested in the affair, and besides I am feeling very tired. Perhaps some other day."

Agatha felt rather hurt at this snub, but said nothing, and cleared up the tea-things. Just as she was going out of the room Mr. Wilson said—

"Oh, I forgot to tell you. I always have a kind of fit when I am waked up and shout out, just as you saw me do to-night. It comes from a fright I had some time ago. Perhaps you will warn the young person who will wake me in the morning as she might be frightened otherwise. And I say, Mrs. Ouseley, don't let there be any gossip about me, please, amongst the neighbours, about my being here and that unpleasant habit of mine, or about my having come here without any baggage or anything of that description. I don't want to be talked about, but wish to lead a quiet and retired life here, going up to town now and then and studying down here."

"You are a student?" asked Agatha.

"Yes, a student of human imbecility," said Mr. Wilson. "I daresay I shall find plenty of subjects here for my purpose. And now, good night. Remember what I have told you if you want to keep me as your lodger long."

"Very well," said Agatha, going out.

As he had said, Mr. Wilson proved to be a very quiet lodger, and apart from the terrible cries that were heard every morning when he was waked, there was positively no objection to be made to the man. He rarely went out and that only in the evenings. He was very simple in his wants and always paid most punctually and liberally for what he had. Certainly, his conduct as well as his mode

of life was mysterious, but Agatha was too happy to have him as a lodger to risk offending him by any prying into his affairs. There was one thing, however, that troubled her a good deal, and this was that she never passed five minutes in his room without his bringing the conversation on the Lafargue case, and discussing it again and again. She found it difficult to reconcile this conduct and this curiosity with the indifference he had expressed on the first night. Then there was his peculiar conduct on waking, which seemed to point to a troubled mind. She could not help thinking often that it was very strange that the person who had entered her house just as she had prayed to be brought face to face with the man she was in search of should be a person of such peculiar manners and of so mysterious a character. She was, however, too practical to jump at any conclusion from such slight premisses, but could not help speculating from time to time on the question whether this could be the Mr. Wilson that she so wanted to meet. She did not believe it because she felt certain that the Mr. Wilson, if indeed Wilson were his name, must be some horrid looking man whose presence would at once reveal who and what he was. This Mr. Wilson on the other hand, though certainly haggard and peculiar in appearance, was sympathetic rather than unpleasant to the eye, and had what Agatha considered a good face. He had fine bright eyes and a very pretty smile at times, which used to light up his face in a wonderful manner and give it a charming expression. This, it was true, was only on very rare occasions, for generally speaking Wilson looked very gloomy and wretched as if constantly brooding over something on his mind.

At the times when he woke up from sleep he was positively hideous, and frightened the servant girl out of

her wits until she had grown accustomed to this habit of his.

As time went on, however, and as Agatha had more time for observing her lodger, what at first had been only vague speculations began to take definite shape of suspicion. It became evident to her that all was not right about this Mr. Wilson. His conduct grew more and more mysterious. It was quite evident that he was in hiding, because he did nothing but mope in doors all day — only going out at nights. He never received any letters, and was never visited by any friends. He did nothing all day but write an occasional letter now and then, the rest of his time he spent in smoking cigarettes and in walking about the little back-garden. One day, Agatha, while tidying up his room, found a white wig under the bed, and a pair of blue spectacles, which she had never seen worn by her lodger, was lying on the table. What did he need a disguise for? Another thing that made her suspicious was, that as time went on, instead of getting tired of talking about the Lafargue affair, his questions grew more and more frequent. "Do you think that they will ever catch the man?" "Why don't you try and catch him yourself?" and so on. He was also constantly talking about Forster and about his trial, and seemed to take a pleasure in attempting to shake Agatha's conviction in his innocence. Curiously enough, and owing to a psychological phenomenon which Agatha could not analyse, the more suspicious the man grew in her eyes the warmer a feeling of friendship towards him grew up in the young woman's heart. It is true that at that time her husband's conduct had become outrageous. Not a day passed now without its storm. For the slightest forgetfulness or mistake on her part he would assail her with the cruellest abuse. She never could meet his wishes about his

food, he was so peevish and capricious. He would order a thing, and then when it was brought him would fly into the most furious passions. But often without any pretext, and apparently from sheer nastiness of temper, he would attack her. Agatha made every allowance for the irritation caused by his illnesses, but at times she did revolt against his flagrant injustices. She was a very warm-blooded, warm-hearted young woman, thirsty for love and kindness; and the life she was leading when Wilson came on the scene was as cruelly devoid of one as of the other. It was no wonder then that she should attach herself to this stranger, who, in spite of all that was strange in his conduct, was in many ways exceedingly sympathetic and lovable. A real friendship sprang up between the two. It pained Agatha somewhat, and she often blamed herself for letting herself be drawn into this state of feeling, but she could not help herself. The choice was between an entirely loveless and friendless life, and this friendship.

One day, just three months after his arrival in her house, a telegram came for Mr. Wilson. He was sitting at lunch at the time, and it was Agatha herself who brought it in. The minute he had glanced at its contents he turned very pale, and jumping up began turning about the room as if seeking an issue. Suddenly he caught hold of Agatha's hand and cried: "You are my friend, are you not?"

"Yes, yes," answered Agatha; "but, Mr. Wilson, what is the matter with you? You look so strange that you frighten me."

"I haven't a minute to lose," he cried, rushing into the bedroom. "They have found me out. Oh, for the love of the Lord, Agatha, if anybody comes and asks for me say that you have nobody in the house, won't you?"

Agatha was just about to answer when a loud double-

knock came at the door. Wilson gave her a beseeching glance and darted into the bedroom, closing the door behind him.

The knocking came again, and Agatha, snatching up the telegram and crushing it into her pocket, went to the door and opened it. She found herself face to face with a smartly dressed young man. Behind him two other men of unpleasant appearance were standing. The young man took off his hat and said, "Mrs. Ouseley, I believe? Yes? Well, is Mr. Wilson in? Your lodger, you know?"

"No, he's not?" cried Agatha. "And for the very simple reason that Mr. Wilson left me two days ago."

"Ah! Oh, did he leave any address?" asked the stranger.

"No, we parted on bad terms. We had a quarrel over the bill, and I refused to take the address he wanted to leave me for his letters. If I remember rightly, he said something about going to Liverpool, but I am not certain."

The young man looked very incredulous, and winked at the two fellows who were standing near him. Then he said: "Then I suppose that your rooms are still to let. I don't see the sign in the window."

"No, I forgot to put it up. Yes, the rooms are to let."

"Ah, very good. In that case, perhaps, you wouldn't mind letting me have a look at them. Wilson used to tell me that he was very comfortable here, and as I am thinking of coming down to Norwood, I shouldn't mind taking them if the price suits."

"I am sorry to say that I can't let you see the rooms to-day," answered Agatha, barring the entrance, as she saw that the young man was trying to push his way into the hall. "They are in a very untidy state. If you like to call to-morrow you can see them. But, by the way,

I forgot to tell you that I don't think that I shall be able to let you have them at all. I don't want to let them any more to single gentlemen, because the profits are so small. I want to find a married couple, or a lady with children."

"Oh, I am very sorry; I should like to have a look at them," continued the stranger, speaking in a pleading tone of voice. "Couldn't you make an exception in my favour, missus, and let me see them to-day?"

"No, sir," said Agatha. Then, feigning a sudden access of bad temper, she pushed the door to and cried—"But I believe you are only having a lark with me. I have no time to stop talking here all day. Please go away; or, if you won't, stop and talk to the doorstep." So saying, she slammed the door to in their faces. She heard the man say:

"Well, we know all we want to know now. He's there, sure enough."

"Yes," muttered one of the other men, "and now he knows that we're after him. It would have been much better to have come with a warrant at once."

"We'll come with it to-morrow. He's safe till then. The old girl lied just for the sake of lying. We'll keep a watch on the premises, and come and fetch him to-morrow. In the meanwhile, should he attempt to get off he will be followed and kept in sight until the warrant is out. It's all right; so now let us go and have a drink at the pub at the corner. You can see anybody coming in or going out of these houses from the bar."

The men then moved off, and Agatha returned into Wilson's room, and into the bedroom. She found it empty. The window was wide open, and looking out she saw, just disappearing over the wall at the back, which

separated the garden from a little lane, the form of an old gentleman, with snowy white hair, and blue spectacles. Turning back into the room she saw lying on the table a five-pound note and a few sovereigns. It was then that she first remembered the telegram that she had in her pocket, and taking it out, read it by the light of the window.

It ran as follows: "Danger. You were followed from Park Lane last night, and your address is known. Fly at once."

"Now, I wonder," said Agatha, as she went upstairs in answer to an angry summons from her husband, "who and what this Mr. Wilson may be? It is—— But, after all," she added, "whatever he may have done he is a very nice fellow, and I like him. Shall I ever see him again?"

If Philip Ouseley could have had an inkling of what was just then germinating in the mind of his patient and submissive wife, he would have had some excuse at least for the furious scene that he then made.

CHAPTER IX.

AGATHA GIVES IN.

THE next day Agatha received two letters. One was from New York and was written by Mr. Mundy. In it he informed Agatha that he had very strong reason for believing that the man Wilson whom they had been tracking over the States was at that moment in England. "Mr. Schneider is on the look out after him, but there is no reason that, if you like to do so, you should not do some work for us also. You know what I have offered and that offer holds good." After considerable particulars and suggestions, he added, "You will have also received a copy of the *New York Informer* giving full particulars of the escape of Forster as well as a copy of the paper containing the story of the boatswain of Lord Brookshire's yacht. What we want to find out is if this story is true. I wired Schneider to interview Lord B., but he cables me that he has tried and has failed to approach him. Perhaps you will have better luck. A full interview with him on the subject of this romantic story would be an exceedingly good thing, and one that I should be prepared to pay for at a very liberal rate. If the story is true, it would appear that Forster did get away after all, and then what you will have to find out is what is the connection between him and the earl. It is also most probable if the story is true that Forster is now in England. An interview with him would be a grand thing. Of course we should take all precautions

to hide his whereabouts, so that he would risk nothing by obliging us. I don't know if just at present I shouldn't prefer an interview with him to the discovery of Wilson. You would ask him for a full account of his prison life, and as to his feelings on the terrible morning of his execution. This should receive very full treatment. Next we should like a very full account of his life in the French prison, and all about his escape and so forth. I would print as much as ever you liked to send me, ten columns if need be, and I would very gladly pay you one hundred dollars a column for it. I would also authorise you to tell Forster to put himself into communication with me, and I would look after his interests for him. Do what you can for me. Mr. Schneider has instructions to advance you any money that you may need for expenses."

The second letter was from London and was written in a hand that Agatha did not recognise. She opened it, and saw that it contained only the one line: "You saved me. I shall not forget." It evidently came from Wilson. That set her thinking that the men had threatened to return that day. She was rather glad of this as she promised to ask them questions, and to find out all she could about her late mysterious lodger. She was, therefore, considerably disappointed when the day passed without bringing their visit with it. The next day Philip was taken dangerously ill again, and she was kept very busy attending to him for that day and several days in succession, during which period, her anxiety being very great, she almost forgot all about the affair; when at last, Philip having got slightly better, she had a little time to think of other things, she began to ask herself whether she should act upon Mundy's suggestion, and make an attempt to interview Lord Brookshire, as she knew from the papers, was at that time living in a

house in Park Lane. The offer was a tempting one, for she knew that Mr. Mundy would keep his promise and pay royally for such an article. On the other hand it was a very difficult undertaking. As to running about the country after the mysterious Wilson from the States, or in quest of Forster; she gave up all thoughts of either undertaking after a very short consideration. She had no time for either. The doctors had told her that Philip needed the very greatest care. It was useless to think of leaving him. Indeed, his situation was a very bad one indeed. The doctors had said that the only chance of restoring him to health was in giving him a complete change of air. They spoke of the Channel Islands or the coast of Devonshire as suitable places. That was, of course, out of the question in the state of their finances for all the money she had been able to save out of the profits she had made out of Wilson, had been swallowed up in the expenses of Philip's illness, and in the meanwhile she had not been able to earn any more. She was in this desperate state, when one morning about a month after Mr. Wilson's departure, she received a letter which both delighted and puzzled her considerably. The following is an exact copy of this missive :

17, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

MADAME,—I have the honour to inform you, that having for many months read your contributions in the "Lady's Guide" with very great interest, I should be very glad to hear from you whether you have in MS. any story suitable for publication in volume form, and if in that case you would be willing to entrust it to me for that purpose. You can find me at the above address, my office, any afternoon from two till three; and I should be very glad if you

would favour me with a call at your convenience, so that we can talk this matter over together. It would save time if in calling you would bring the suggested manuscript with you. I am rather in a hurry as the book season is now close upon us, and I should like to bring your story out in time to meet the coming demand.

I have the honour to remain, Madame,

Yours respectfully,

JNO. SURBITON.

Agatha clapped her hands with joy on finishing this letter. Its contents seemed almost too good to be true.

All her life long she had had the ambition to come forward as a writer of novels, but opportunity had always failed her and by stress of necessity she had been forced to write, not what she wanted or liked to write, but what could find an immediate market. Here then, was the opportunity she had so long waited for. Here was a Paternoster Row publisher writing to her, unsolicited, to ask her to allow him to publish one of her books. This might be the beginning of quite a new life. If the book were to be a success—and she had no doubt that it would be—her future was assured. How much better and pleasanter this was after all than doing police jobs for the *Informer*. Here was the prospect of a quiet life, with comforts assured—if not wealth—and possibly of fame, for which, ambitious as she was, she had always longed.

Having read the letter over twenty times, she ran upstairs to her room to pick out from a large quantity of manuscripts that were stored up in a drawer in her bedroom the story that she thought possessed the greatest merit. She was not long in deciding, and having told the good news to Philip and obtained permission from him to

go up to town that afternoon to see the wonderful Mr. Surbiton, she at once set off with her manuscript in a little black bag, taking the train at the Low Level Station to St. Paul's, from which a few minutes' walk brought her to Paternoster Row, which she reached just as the clock was striking two. When she had got outside No. 17, she looked about for some sign of the business premises of Mr. Surbiton, and was considerably disappointed not to see any such name either on the door or over any of the shops in that or any of the neighbouring houses. She then noticed for the first time that the address on her letter was only a written one. Whilst she was wondering if this might not, after all, be a practical joke played upon her by one of the clerks in the "Ladies' Guide" office, or by some unkind *confrère* on that magazine, and was standing looking disconsolately to the right and to the left, a little boy with a very dirty face came out of No. 17, and after staring hard at her for some time, came up and said, "Are you after Mr. Subbiton?"

"Yes," said Agatha, feeling more and more disappointed.

"Oh, then you had better follow me," said the youth.

"I'm his office boy. He's a waiting for you upstairs and told me to keep a look-out for you. Come along with me. It is at the top of the house."

Agatha felt horribly disappointed. She felt certain now that this Mr. Surbiton was some fraud, probably one of those scoundrelly publishers who infest London, and who make fat livings by swindling inexperienced authors. He would pretend to accept her manuscript with enthusiasm, and then would come out with the suggestion that she should pay the expenses of publishing it, and so forth. She was quite ashamed that with her knowledge of the world she should have allowed herself to believe in anything else.

She was just debating whether to go away when the little boy, who had been waiting for her at the bottom of the staircase, turned round and said, "If you want to see Mr. Surbiton to-day, mum, you had better come at once. I know that he is in a hurry to be off, 'cos he told me to hurry you up if I were to see you."

Agatha followed him up the stairs. After all she would lose nothing by seeing the man. She ran no risk beyond one of being disappointed as to the publication of her book, and that was nothing novel to her.

Whatever hopes she may still have had vanished as she entered the general publishing offices of Mr. John Surbiton. These were situated at the very top of the house, in a room which was little better than an attic, and which was furnished simply with a plain deal table and a couple of kitchen chairs. An old almanac of the year 1873 hung over the mantelpiece, and that was all. Mr. Surbiton was standing at the window smoking a cigar as she entered. As soon as he heard her step he turned round and took off his hat. He was an old gentleman with a ruddy face and a kindly look.

"To whom have I the pleasure——" he began, smiling, and placing one of the deal chairs for Agatha to sit down upon.

Agatha refused the chair because she could see that the interview could not be a very lengthy one.

"I am Mrs. Agatha Ouseley," she said. "I came up in consequence of your letter that I received this morning. You are Mr. John Surbiton, I believe?"

"Ah, Mrs. Ouseley. Very good, very good. Pray do be seated. I am very glad to see you. A great admirer of your work I am, Mrs. Ouseley. I read everything you write with the greatest interest, and I am sure that a novel

from your gifted pen would have very great success with the public. You have never published in volume form before, I believe?"

"No," said Agatha, sitting down at the publisher's repeated invitation. "I brought you up a manuscript to look at. But I may as well tell you at once, Mr. Surbiton, that——"

He interrupted her here, crying: "Now let me look at that manuscript without loss of time. I am most anxious to have a look at that manuscript. Show us the manuscript?"

Agatha opened her bag, and produced the roll of paper, which she handed to the publisher. He snatched it up, and fixing a large pair of silver-rimmed spectacles on to his nose, went to the window, and began turning over the leaves of the manuscript.

"Capital title, that! Capital! Good opening, catches the interest at the first page; can't lay it down until the last is reached, and so on. Ah! that is well put in—a masterly stroke. There she lets him have it again. Ha! ha! just what I thought; the villain wasn't going to get off as easy as all that. Abigail, too, dear me! Very pleasantly put, that passage——" and so he went on for fully a quarter-of-an-hour, commenting aloud as he turned over the written leaves.

Agatha was thinking that he was wasting a great deal of time, and of variety talent, if he thought he would be able to bamboozle her with all that nonsense, when he suddenly turned round, and, coming up to the table, asked:

"How many words do you call this story?"

"I think," said Agatha, "that it would run to three volumes. The MS. contains about one hundred and ten thousand words."

"Ah, very good. Just the length I like. Make a three-volume of it. And now, Mrs. Ouseley, as to terms. Supposing I offered to purchase this manuscript, what price would you expect me to pay for it? I am not prepared to pay a very high price, but I should not like to drive a hard bargain with you. You should take into consideration that I shall spend a good deal of money in advertising the book, and that consequently you will derive a further indirect advantage from the transaction."

Agatha was just going to reply, feeling very much more hopeful, when the publisher interrupted her, saying: "I had better make you my final offer at once, to save any bargaining. You call this manuscript one of 110,000 words, but you don't make allowance for a number of blanks at the ends of the pages, and so forth. I will tell you what I will do. I will consider this a manuscript of 100,000 words, and pay you for it at the rate of fifty shillings the thousand words. Will that suit you?"

Agatha could hardly believe her ears. Flushing up with pleasure, she answered in a voice trembling with suppressed emotion, "That would make——"

"Let me see—£250 for the whole book. If you like to take that, I am prepared to give you a cheque for the amount at once on your signing a receipt for the sum. What do you say?"

Agatha merely nodded her head. She was afraid to speak lest she should betray her surprise and her delight.

"Very good, then," said Mr. Surbiton, opening a drawer in the table and producing a large cheque book. "Let me see. Mrs. Ouseley, is it not? So—£250. To bearer, I suppose? There, that's done. Now then, just write your name at the bottom of that receipt, assigning the copyright

of this novel to me. There, then, the business is finished. You will receive proofs in a few days."

"Oh, then don't send them to my London address," cried Agatha, "I shall be going out of town almost directly. My husband is very ill, and a change has been ordered. We shall probably go to the country in a few days."

"Very good, then," said Mr. Surbiton. "Write to me as soon as you are settled, and proofs shall follow at once. I shall put it into the printer's hands forthwith. And now I really do not see why I should keep you any longer. I, on my side, have a very important engagement to keep, and so you will excuse me. Good morning, Mrs. Ouseley, good morning. Delighted to have made your acquaintance and to have secured your book."

Agatha hardly knew what she was doing, until she found herself standing in the Row with the cheque in her hand. Then, for the first time, she looked at it. Yes, it was all right. What could this mean, she wondered. It seemed too good to be true. Here was a publisher paying a high price for the manuscript of a perfectly unknown author without even examining it. Suddenly it struck her that the cheque might be a worthless one; but the next moment she reflected that that was extremely improbable. Why should Mr. Surbiton have acted like that, her manuscript being practically and from a commercial point of view worth next to nothing. Besides, it was easy to find out. The cheque was on the Ludgate Hill branch of a City Bank, at two minutes' walk from where she stood. She set out at once for the address given on the cheque, and a minute or two later she was standing with a throbbing heart at the bank counter, while the paying clerk examined the cheque she had presented. Would he shake his head and return it with a suspicious glance at her? He did

nothing of the sort, but filing the cheque on a hook at the side of his desk asked the pleasant words: "How will you take it, madame, in notes or gold?"

"I beg your pardon," stammered Agatha.

The clerk repeated his question, and at last she understood that it was all right. She asked for notes, and having received these she walked out of the bank almost intoxicated with pleasure. The office of the "Lady's Guide" being close by she went there and asked the editor whether he knew this Mr. Surbiton, the publisher.

He said that he had never heard of him and that he did not believe that any such publisher existed. To settle his doubts he sent for a directory and looked in vain for the name of the person mentioned. There had certainly been no such person in business at the beginning of the year in the publishing trade.

"But it is quite possible," he said "that he may be one of the partners of some big London firm, and has been doing a bit of business on his own account."

This explanation only half satisfied Agatha. However, she was too happy with the result obtained to trouble much about the matter, and set off for Norwood feeling happier than she had ever felt in her life before. It was less on account of the handsome sum of money which she had received, and which enabled her to help her husband to recover his health, than because at last the prospect opened before her of a tranquil life, with just the employment that best suited her tastes and her nature. Philip was of course delighted at the news, and it was at once agreed between the two that they should set off for Guernsey in three days from that time. Preparations were at once made, and on the day fixed Philip and Agatha Ouseley took the train at Waterloo for the Southampton boat.

CHAPTER X.

THE RAPPING AT THE WINDOW.

AFTER looking about for some time after their arrival in Guernsey, the Ouseleys decided upon taking a very pretty little house situated in a large garden near Moulin Huet Bay. It was in a very quiet spot quite close to the sea. The garden shelved down a slope to the beach, and was skirted on the right by huge cliffs. Just at the bottom of the garden, that is to say, in its extreme left-hand corner, there was the mouth of a large cave, which according to popular report had at one time been the storehouse and rendezvous of a gang of smugglers. This was a picturesque and a romantic addition to the attractions of the place, and one which had had much to do with deciding Agatha to take it.

As soon as they were settled, Agatha wrote again to Mr. Surbiton, and told him that she would be very pleased to receive the proofs of her novel. She also wrote to Mr. Mundy to tell him that she must definitely abandon all thoughts of assisting him in his project, as she was not free, being married to an invalid, to do what she chose. Having got this off her mind she settled down at once to her new life, and worked with great ardour at a new novel which she had long been carrying round in her head, but which she had never had the time to commence in the old days of her drudgery.

In the meanwhile Philip's health improved wonderfully,

and already after a few weeks' stay in the beneficial climate he was able to get about and could even take walks in the country, leaning on his wife's arm. His temper also seemed to improve with his health, and there were times when Agatha began to think that in this respect also her life might eventually become a happy one. Not that she hoped ever to love her husband, that she had never done, for her marriage had been merely caused by the disgust of her solitary life. She had met Philip. He had fallen in love with her on account of her beauty and her great intelligence, thinking also, doubtless, that such a wife would be an invaluable assistance to a lazy man. She had accepted him because her solitude tired her and she saw no prospect of ever getting any other companion. It was not long, however, before she had begun to regret her former dullness, for not long after their marriage Philip's abominable temper began to show itself. He proved himself to be cruel and cowardly, and unspeakably mean and selfish. Yet Agatha always remained a true and loyal wife to him, and tried hard to get a feeling of friendship for him in her heart. She knew that she could never hope to have any more tender feeling for this despicable person, but for the sake of her own happiness she ardently desired that the day might come when his company would not be, as it was then, almost always a perfect torture to undergo.

As has been said, immediately she had had a definite address to give, Agatha had written to Mr. Surbiton. She was rather surprised not to receive any answer from him, but considering that there might have been some delay at the printing office, waited for some time before writing again. At the end of two months, however, she wrote to say that she was anxiously expecting her proofs, and would be obliged for news as to the date of publication of her book.

By return of post she received a letter from the publisher enclosing a cheque for £100, payable at one of the Guernsey banks. The letter ran :—

“DEAR MADAM,—I am in receipt of your two letters, and write to inform you that we did not find it necessary to send you proofs, the manuscript being so clear and correct. The book has been produced in America through our Philadelphia house, and has met with a very great success. We shall bring it out in England in a short time. In the meanwhile, however, I should be much obliged to you if you could entrust the publication of your next volume to me. I should be glad to receive it at once so that it could be brought out in the States the moment the success of your first has been exhausted, a contingency of which, I am glad to say, I see no present prospect. I enclose you a cheque for £100 on account, for which please send receipt, and at the same time please let me know whether I may expect another manuscript from you, and at what date. As I have already informed you, the earlier it could be in my hands the better. I will send you copies of the American edition of your novel at an early date.

“Hoping to hear from you at your earliest convenience, I have the honour to remain,

“Yours very truly,

“JNO. SURBITON.”

This letter reached Agatha one evening after Philip had retired to his room. She at once ran upstairs to tell him the good news. She was surprised to find the door of his bedroom locked. When she had knocked, he cried out that he did not want to be disturbed; but, on her insisting upon seeing him, he got out of bed, and, after some shuffling

about the room, came to the door and opened it. She noticed that the table was drawn up to the bedside, and that there were pen and ink and some of her manuscript paper lying on it.

"What! are you taking to writing, too?" she cried, laughing.

"Never you mind," answered her husband, snappishly; "and what if I were. I suppose you think that you are the only woman, the only person, in the world, who can write. Well, what have you come bothering me for? Will you leave that paper alone?" he cried, suddenly starting out of bed, and raising his hand with a menacing gesture, as Agatha put her hand on a few sheets of paper that were lying face downwards on the table. "Touch that again if you dare, and I'll knock every bit of life out of you!"

His reception rather spoiled Agatha's pleasure in telling him the news. He received it very unkindly, and said: "You are getting quite stuck up about your success. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if that old Surbiton isn't ——"

"Well, go on," cried Agatha, with flashing eyes, "say it if you dare."

Philip answered nothing, and turned over on his side in bed, whilst Agatha went downstairs, profoundly indignant. However, she soon recovered her good temper, and at once set about revising the manuscript of the new novel which she had just finished, so as to be able to send it off to London at once.

This work took her almost all night, and when it was done she thought it would be a good thing to send it off at once so as to lose no time.

The mail boat starts from St. Peter's Port at about nine in the morning, and letters can be taken on board

ship and posted there up to that hour. Agatha determined to take the early walk to town and to send her manuscript off to London by that morning's boat. She accordingly spent the rest of her time in writing a letter to Mr. Surbiton accepting his offer, and advising him of the parcel of manuscript that accompanied her letter. When this was done, she set about making the manuscript up into a packet for posting. To do this she needed some stout paper, and remembering to have seen some in the drawer of her commode in the bedroom she ran upstairs with her manuscript in her hand to fetch it. She found Philip fast asleep, and noticed that the candle had burnt down very low before it had been extinguished. The ink bottle, which had been quite full, had been nearly emptied, and stood tilted up against the candlestick. "He must have been writing all night," she thought; and began wondering what it might be. But having little time to lose, she went at once to the drawer, and there, after some turning over of the papers it contained, found what she wanted. As she pulled it out, she saw a parcel of manuscript lying stowed away in one corner of the drawer, and recognised her husband's writing. This was what he had been writing.

"Poor fellow," she whispered, casting a kindly glance at the bed in which the wasted form of the invalid lay stretched out. "I suppose that he has been trying his hand, too, at authorship. I daresay he thinks that it is hard that I should have all the work of the house to do, and this is an attempt on his part to help to make money. Well, I think it is very good of him, seeing how ill he is, poor fellow."

Just then a thought struck her. Supposing she were to send this MSS. off to her friend and patron, Mr. Surbiton,

and ask him as a favour to her to try and dispose of it to the best advantage to one of the magazines, supposing he could not use it himself. She wouldn't tell Philip anything about it unless he discovered the loss of the manuscript, but only if Mr. Surbiton accepted it. Then she would tell her husband, and give him the pleasure of the good news that his first literary effort had been accepted, and, what would please him infinitely more, bought and paid for. This idea she immediately acted upon, and running downstairs, packed the two MSS. up into one parcel, and tearing open the envelope addressed to Mr. Surbiton added a postscript, explaining her wishes with reference to her husband's paper. She had not had time to look at it, she wrote, but from a glance she had taken at it, it seemed to her to be some sensational story connected with Socialism, so much in vogue just then. She prayed the publisher to stretch a point to oblige her in this matter. She then addressed another envelope, and at once set off for the town. She reached it in time to post her two letters safely. Then before returning home she went to the bank and cashed Mr. Surbiton's cheque. She next made a few purchases, and at last went home. Philip was still sleeping, doubtless having tired himself out by his work in the night. Agatha felt quite tender towards him, and bending over the bed kissed him on his pale face. "Poor fellow," she said as she went downstairs. "Perhaps if his life had been a happier one he would have been a better man. Already, now that things are brightening, he has changed for the better. Who knows? some day, perhaps, I may be able to like him really."

After lunch Agatha felt very tired, and not wishing to disturb her husband by going up to her room, lay down on the sofa in the parlour and went to sleep. It was late in the

evening before she awoke. Philip was still fast asleep upstairs, but this did not surprise her at all, as from his weakness it was very usual for him to sleep sometimes twenty hours at a stretch, especially when he had fatigued himself at all. Agatha was very vexed at having slept so long, because she knew that it would now be impossible for her to get to sleep again that night, and she had nothing particular to do to occupy a vigil with. It was out of the question to do any more writing, as it was her rule to rest herself for certain fixed periods between each work. At last she made up her mind to pass the night reading and accordingly sat down in the sitting-room over one of Balzac's novels. It was a bright moonlight night.

After having read till about midnight, Agatha laid down her book and went to the window and looked out into the garden, which was looking lovely in the moonlight. At the far end of the garden she could see the level of the sea on which at that moment a long line of light was laid where the moonbeams touched the waters. All in the house and around it was wrapped in complete silence.

Suddenly Agatha started back from the window with a low cry of terror. It seemed to her that there was someone walking in the garden within a few paces of where she stood. This noise, coming thus in upon the silence of her reverie, startled her so much that, with an almost instinctive gesture, she drew down the blind and stepped back into the room, pressing her hand to her heart. At that moment she heard a low rapping at the window of the adjoining dining-room, which was separated only from the room in which she was sitting by the passage from the entrance-vestibule.

There was no mistaking it. There was someone in the garden rapping stealthily at the window. Agatha did not

reflect that it was extremely improbable that any burglar would take such a measure to announce his nocturnal visit ; she only thought of the hundred pounds she had lying in her bureau drawer, and that she was alone in the house with an invalid, whom it might kill to be waked to a fright. There were no arms in the house except a revolver which was in her husband's room, and she feared that if she were to go upstairs to fetch it, she would wake him, as he must by that time have nearly slept himself out. Whilst these reflections were passing through her head, the rapping came again, this time rather louder. Agatha mustered up her courage, and, with a beating heart, went out through the passage into the dining-room. The blinds were down in the room, and there against the red stuff, through which the moonlight was shining brightly, she could distinctly see the shadow of a crouching form, which ever and again raised a hand and rapped stealthily at the window-pane. Sinister recollections passed through the young woman's mind as she stood thus in the centre of the room. The shadow of the hand resembled some claw of a grotesque monster. Thoughts of the weird stories of Poe and of Hoffman rushed into her head. What was that legend that the country people spoke about in that part of the island ? Was this the vampire chatelain who walked of nights thirsting for the blood of women and of children ? Was it the banshee, and would soon a wailing cry tell her that the sleep of Philip had turned into the sleep from which there is no awakening ?

Again the claw-like shadow rose against the lurid pane, and again the knocking came with the sharp, clear sound of horn against glass. There was no enduring this suspense any longer. Better to face the danger than thus to madden herself with fearful speculations. Agatha stepped

forward and laid her hand upon the string of the blind. She stood thus a second, within an inch of the crouching form, before pulling up the blind, that now alone separated them, and it struck her afterwards as very strange that just at that moment, instead of feeling all the terror of her position, she thought what a capital story this would make, say for the *New York Informer*, if well written up and presented under startling headlines. Then, just as the hand was raised again, she mustered up her courage and drew the blind upwards.

At the same moment, however, the man who had been crouching outside started up from his position, and, with a low cry, darted away from the house and ran as though for his life down the garden. Agatha stood at the window looking after him and saw him disappear in the direction of the smuggler's cave. Considerably relieved, she stepped back from the window and went out of the room, locking the door behind her. She then returned into the drawing-room, and placing the candle near the window so that its light might be seen from the garden, went out and locked this room also. She then stole upstairs and tried the door of her husband's room, but finding it locked and not wishing to disturb and frighten him went away as quietly, and made her way up to a little attic at the top of the house, from which a full view of the garden could be obtained, and of the mouth of the cave. She seated herself at the open window, determined at the first attempt of the intruder to approach the house, to raise the whole neighbourhood with her cries. She had hardly been sitting there for ten minutes, however, when a noise at the back of the house drew her attention. The next moment the sound of several footsteps was heard, and then a loud knock came at the back-door. The knock sounded like an honest one, and

fearing lest her husband should be waked, she determined to go downstairs. A moment later she was standing in the passage behind the kitchen-door.

"Who is there?" she cried, as the knock was repeated. "What do you want at this hour of the night?"

"Beg pardon, mum," answered a gruff voice. "It's me, Inspector Williams, of the Royal Guernsey Constabulary Force, along with his mates."

"What do you want?" asked Agatha. "I really can't be disturbed at this hour of the night. Go away, and come in the morning, or I shall have to call the men down to drive you away."

"It's important, mum, that I should see you to-night. Don't be frightened, and open the door. Here is my card. I will push it under the door. You see that it's all right."

At the same time a card was pushed under the door, and Agatha taking it up, read by the light of the candle she held in her hand the name, designation, and address of the inspector who had spoken. Fully reassured she opened the door, and found herself face to face with three members of the Guernsey police force in uniform.

"I am sure we are very sorry to disturb you, mum," said the inspector, raising his cap; "but it's rather important business brings us here. You don't happen to have heard any rum noises in the garden to-night; do you?"

"Oh! and indeed I have," cried Agatha. "But won't you come into the kitchen, where we can talk more quietly. I must tell you that my husband is very ill in bed, and I don't want to wake him if it is possible to avoid it." So saying, she ushered the three men into the kitchen, and, closing the door, said: "I have been terribly frightened this evening."

She then told them what happened.

"That's just what has brought us here, madam," said the inspector. "That fellow has been hanging about St. Peter's Port for some time, and we have had our eye upon him because we believed all along that he was up to no good. This morning, whilst I was on plain clothes duty, I saw him again, and I afterwards heard as how he had followed you about ever since you came off the boat. I then heard that he had been seen following you to the bank. I then went to the bank, and there I heard that you had been and had cashed a cheque. I then began to smell a rat. Here was you cashing a big cheque, and carrying it home to your lonely country house in a little black bag, and there was Master Joker, about whom nobody knows nothing, a-followering of you about. It did look queer, and qucerer still when a fellow from this part of the island came into the central office this evening, and told us as how a strange and suspicious-looking man had been seen hanging about Moulin Huet all day. I at once made up my mind that it was your hundred pounds that he was after, and so, taking two men with me, came out here straight. We had an accident on the way, or we should have been here an hour ago. As it is, no harm has been done, thank heavens."

"And you came just in time to relieve me of terrible anxiety, and to catch this man. The scoundrel, to want to steal my hard-earned hundred pounds!"

"You say that he went for the cave?" asked the inspector.

"Yes, at the bottom of the garden. I am sure he is hiding there now."

"Well, then," said the inspector, turning to his men, "supposing we go and pay him a visit. Oh! but I say,"

looking out of the window, "here's bad luck. The clouds have come up, and it's quite dark again. We shall never find our way, and Mr. Joker may escape us."

"Oh, I'll go with you," said Agatha. "The wretch, I shall be glad to repay him the fright he gave me just now. I have got a lantern here, and I will go with you. I know the cave as I have been in it several times. It is very long and winding, and would afford a refuge for the whole Newgate Calendar-ful of criminals."

As she spoke she lighted the candle in a lantern that she had taken from one of the kitchen corners. When it was ready she said, "Well, let's be going."

"Right you are," said the inspector, "and you chaps keep a sharp look out that he don't give us the go-by in the dark. Drat the moon, just going out when we wanted her most."

The cave was duly reached and entered. Agatha preceded, holding the lantern in her hand. Every nook and cranny of the entrance was carefully investigated, but not a trace of the man was to be seen.

"I am sure he is here," said Agatha raising her voice; "probably hiding away back there."

"We'll get up to him in time," said the inspector, "and then away, away for Botany Bay."

At any other time Agatha would have split her sides with laughing at the ludicrous appearance of the three great men, as they stumbled and slipped over the slippery stones, and at the fantastic shadows that the lantern cast upon them all. But just then she was feeling very excited and interested in this human chase. She could not help thinking that this was just what Mr. Mundy had asked her to do and what she had refused. Now she was doing exactly the same thing with infinite gusto. It was true

that in this case the criminal had been planning an attack upon her, and that he had given her one of the worst frights that she had ever undergone.

As it has been said, Agatha was ahead of the men, and when the end of the cave was reached, that is to say about ten yards from the mouth, where the excavation went off at right angles to the opening passage—she was about two yards ahead of the inspector; the other men, both superstitious Irishmen, were lagging behind only half relishing this nightly excursion in so uncanny a place. It was accordingly Agatha who turned the corner first. Halting here she swung her lantern so that its light fell now on one side, now on the other of the walls of the cave.

Suddenly she gave a little cry, for, looking up, she had seen crouching in a nook in the rock just three feet above her head, the figure of the man that they were hunting down. She had just opened her mouth to call for help, and had already cried out, "Oh, I say," when the man, putting his finger to his lips with an imploring gesture, put his hand into his bosom and drawing something thence, threw it in her face. She put up her hand and caught it, and by the light of her lantern saw that it was a lock of hair—a lock of her own hair. At that very moment the inspector's voice was heard behind the rock that jutted out forming the corner.

"What is it, madame," he cried.

"It's, its—" stammered Agatha, not knowing what to do. "It's that I have slipped and dropped my lantern into a pool." As she spoke, and just as the inspector was turning the corner and in another moment would have seen the fugitive, she dropped the lantern into a large piece of water at her feet, plunging the whole scene into black night.

"Here's pretty to do," said the inspector, "for, with just my luck, I haven't got a match upon me."

"And if you had, sir," said one of the men, "it wouldn't be much use for lighting a lantern that is two feet under water would it?"

"It's very annoying. The fellow is sure to escape now," said the inspector, "and I was so counting on his capture. It would have been a capital thing for us, Jobson."

"Yes, it would have been a good thing. But I don't see," answered the other, "why we should despair of laying hands on him yet. What's to prevent one of us running up to the house and getting a light?"

"Whilst the rest of us remain here on sentry," said the inspector. "Certainly, that's what we ought to do. You run up and take the lamp out of the kitchen and get some matches. The lady I am sure will have no objection."

"Oh, dear," cried Agatha, letting herself slip. "Oh, I have hurt myself."

"What is it?" cried the inspector, as she caught at his arm, helping her to rise.

"I have sprained my ankle," cried Agatha. "I am sure that I have. Oh, it pains me to stand. Take me home at once—please carry me home. I can't stand, and I daren't sit down on these wet rocks, for I am sure I should catch my death of cold."

"Well, here's a pretty go," said the inspector. "If ever I lay hands on that chap, he shall pay for this evening with the rest. Here, give us a hand, Tom. You and I will carry the lady up back to the house while Jack keeps watch here to see that that fellow don't slink out."

"Oh, I say," said the policeman named Jack, "I don't like the idea of staying all alone in this gloomy old cave."

"What do you mean by talking rubbish like that before

the lady?" asked the inspector, angrily. "You are a disgrace to the police force, that's what you are."

"Oh, well, I never said that I wouldn't do my duty," answered the other; "all I said was that I don't like the idea of it at all. I'll stay if I have to, that's all."

"And keep a very sharp look-out," answered Agatha, raising her voice and turning her head in the direction of the nook where the man was hiding, "because nothing will be easier than for the man to slip out past you and to run up and hide himself in the kitchen, or in my drawing-room, and to come out and attack me after you have gone."

"Oh! no fear of that," said the inspector. "Jack will keep his eye open. Now then my lady if you are ready. One, two, and away."

With these words the two policemen hoisted Agatha into their arms and carried her carefully out of the cave and up the lawn, back to her house, where they deposited her, at her own request, in the armchair in the kitchen. They then provided themselves with a lamp and some matches, and returned, running to the cave to continue their search. As they approached it, however, they saw their comrade had left it, and was standing, trembling, at a distance of about twenty yards from its mouth.

"Well, you're a pretty fellow," cried the inspector.

"I couldn't help it," said the man. "It was too lonesome in there. But I'll stake my head nobody has come out of there since you have been gone. I have kept ears and eyes open."

"Well, if he has escaped," said the inspector, "'twill be to you, Mr. Jack, that we shall owe our failure."

The three men then re-entered the cave and commenced a thorough search, exploring every nook and cranny to the very end. But it was clear that if the man had been there

at all, he had been able to make good his escape. There was not a trace of him anywhere.

At last, tired of searching in vain, the policemen returned to the house, after searching the garden through, from one end to another. Agatha came out to meet them at the kitchen door, and taking the lamp from them, asked them to take a glass of rum.

"You won't mind drinking it out here?" she said. "I am so frightened lest all this walking about should wake my husband, or I would ask you to come into the kitchen."

"So you haven't been able to find the man?" she continued, as she handed each man his glass of rum.

"No, mum," said the inspector. "You can rest quite assured that the fellow is not on the premises. Guess we've scared him off this time. No fear, however, of our missing him in the end. He is sure and certain to turn up in town to-morrow, and then we'll lay hands on him."

"There, good-night," said Agatha; "thank you very much, I am sure. I think I should have died from fright if you hadn't come. And I do hope that you will catch that wretch soon."

"Not a doubt of our doing so," cried the inspector, as he moved off with his men. "Good-night, lady."

"Good-night." "Good-night," echoed the two others.

"Good-night," said Agatha, closing the kitchen door.

CHAPTER XI.

A MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

AS soon as the heavy footsteps of the constables had died away, Agatha, who had been standing listening at the door, crept on tip-toe back to the kitchen. Here she blew out the light, and, closing the door behind her, crept as quietly to the drawing-room. She paused for a moment outside the door, and then, turning the handle noiselessly, stole into the room. It was quite dark, save for a vague and lurid light where the faint moonshine came in through the lowered blinds.

"It is I," she whispered. "Are you there?"

From out one of the corners of the room came the whispered answer: "Yes, Agatha, I am here. I understood what you said in the cave, and crept up here the minute the policemen had gone."

"You call me by my name. How do you know it? Who are you?"

"I am Forster, Agatha, the unhappy wretch whose life you endeavoured to save, and whose liberty you have saved this night."

"Forster? Of course. You had my lock of hair. But it is strange your voice seems very familiar to me. Let me think. I know who you are," she cried, raising her voice above the whisper, "you are—you are Wilson, who was with me in London."

"Yes," said the voice in the dark.

"But I don't understand," pursued Agatha.

"I was Forster in France," answered the voice, "I am Wilson in England. Wilson is my real name."

"But why do you have two names? Isn't that suspicious?"

"I will tell you. When I was quite a young man I quarrelled with my father, and left him to go and try my fortunes in Paris. I was so angry with him, and so determined to be independent of him and his, that when I reached Paris I cast off his name and took that of my mother who was a Forster. I lived under this name all the time I was in Paris, and afterwards when I returned to England. Now that that name is a notorious one, and it would be at the risk of my liberty that I should wear it, I have resumed my father's name. Besides, I have now every reason for loving my father seeing that, in spite of my conduct, and in spite of this terrible accusation that has been brought against me, he helped me to escape, and extends his help and his protection to me in every way in his power."

Agatha said nothing, for a horrible thought was occupying her mind. Forster and Wilson? What proved that he had not lived under the double name in Paris also, and that the Wilson she was searching for was not Forster after all, also. That would mean that all the evidence she had gathered together against Wilson was only so much more proof of Forster's guilt. At last, however, she said—

"What brought you to Guernsey?"

"I came to Guernsey to be near you. You are the only friend I have in the world except my father, and he, for certain reasons, cannot see me but in private. He is a terribly proud man, and the thought that some day I may be taken again, and all the shame fall on his head, forces him to treat me as he does. If I could prove my innocence

he would be proud to own me as his son, but until then he would rather have people believe, as they do believe, that Robert Wilson died long ago. My father has a great name now, and is a prominent man. There is nothing in this world that he cares for more than his position in the eyes of the world. I cannot blame him for what he does. But it is miserable to have no one to be kind to me, no one who is convinced that I am an ill-used man, and it is because you, Agatha, are the only person in the world perhaps who believe me innocent that I have come to be near you."

"How did you know my address?"

"From Mr. Surbiton, my father's solicitor."

"But Mr. Surbiton is a publisher," cried Agatha.

"No, he is my father's solicitor. I know what you are referring to, and that was my father's plan to help you. He gave those instructions to Surbiton because I had told him about you and about how you had tried to help me. It was a way of helping you to money. Not that the bargain is a sham one. Surbiton means to do what he said, and will publish, or has published, your book, and it will be largely advertised, and is doubtless a very clever book, is certain to succeed, and to repay him what he advanced."

Agatha was not particularly pleased, in her vanity as an authoress, to hear this piece of news. However, the concluding part of the young man's sentence somewhat reassured her. Of course, Surbiton would make a very good thing out of the book, no doubt of that.

"But why did you come in that mysterious fashion and run the risk of being taken for a thief, as indeed you were. Supposing those men had found you in the cave you would have been arrested and——"

"And taken to prison in St. Peter's Port," continued Forster in a low voice. "There I should have been forced

to make some strange explanation which would have seemed so extraordinary to the police that they would have kept me for further enquiries. The result of that would have been that in a short time I should have been recognised as Forster, the escaped convict, who is being hunted for all over England. I should have been taken back to that hell to die in misery. That is what you saved me from."

"But why, then, did you expose yourself to that by coming as you did. No wonder people are suspicious about you if you act so foolishly."

"I know—I know," stammered Forster; "but I have my reason for being timid in your presence, Agatha. I was hanging about outside the house all the afternoon, and didn't dare approach you. It was only when it was getting very late in the night that I made up my mind to knock as I did."

"What reason have you?" said Agatha.

"Simply this one," said Forster, very quietly, "that since I have seen you I have loved you like a madman."

"Ah!" said Agatha.

"I should not have told you but for your question. I know that you are married, and that I have no right to love you. But I do, and shall do to my dying day. But there is no reason to speak about that now."

"No," said Agatha; "it will be better not to speak about that."

"No. That was the reason why I acted so like a fool to-night, and risked what I have told you."

"You say," said Agatha, after a pause, in which her mind had been full of the man's confession towards her, "that you are being hunted for all over England. By whom?"

"The French authorities know that I am in England. It

appears that Mundy's paper, in its desire to give news, has, as they style it, given me away. Those men that came that day to Norwood were detectives acting on behalf of the French government. But for that blunder of theirs in not bringing a warrant with them at once, and but for the telegram that I received from my father, I should now have been back in Nouméa instead of being, where, of all places in the world, I would rather be, that is, near to Agatha Ousley, my only friend."

"And what are your plans for the future? You cannot stay in England if what you say is true, and now that the police here also know you, you will have to leave the island. What do you mean to do?"

"That is what I wanted to ask you? I have come to ask you for your advice and help. I have so great faith in your sense that I would blindly obey you, whatever you might command me to do—except," he added, in a determined voice, "except if you tell me to go away from you and never to approach you again. That I should refuse to do, even at the risk of being taken again. There is no reason that I can see why I shouldn't stay here. If the police see me going about with you they will never think that I am the same man they were hunting for in your garden; besides, you know how well I can make up. That is one of the things that I learnt in that hell."

"It is quite out of the question that you should remain here, and out of the question that we should see each other after this night. Remember what you have told me about your feelings towards me."

"I know, but I am quite innocent. Why can't I love you without doing harm to anybody?"

"It is not possible. It would not be fair to Philip for me to have you near me after what you have told me, and

seeing that I also——Nonsense, what am I talking about?"

"I came also to ask you if you saw any chance of ever being able to save me—to ask you whether you would do for pity of me what you refused to do as a piece of duty for the paper. It is my only hope of salvation, for though both my father and the *Informer* people are doing all they can to hunt up this Wilson, or Wisnol, that you discovered, I do not believe they will ever succeed. If anybody is to find him and so to rescue me from my martyrdom it is you, Agatha. You will not abandon me, will you?"

Agatha said nothing for some time. At last she broke the silence by saying :

"There is one thing that I want you to tell me. It is the only thing in your trial that struck me as peculiar, and the point which at times made me doubt, before I knew you, whether the prosecution was not right after all. It is about that cheque which you said you received, and which enabled you to pay back what you owed to Lafargue and to settle up with your landlord. The prosecution said that you did that with the money you stole from the murdered man. It seemed very strange that you should refuse to say who sent you the money, and I think that that was the strongest piece of evidence against you. Will you tell me who sent it, and why you refused to explain a circumstance which would have saved you from all your troubles?"

"My reason was a very simple one. When I found that I had totally failed in my endeavour to support myself independently of my father in Paris, and had the option between humiliating myself and being flung into the streets to die of starvation, I wrote to my father's solicitor, who, at the time of the quarrel, had received from my father instructions to pay me a pound a week for my maintenance. I had always refused the money, being too proud to take it. But things

having got so desperate with me, I wrote to him to ask him to send me thirty pounds, which was enough to enable me to pay off all my debts in Paris and to get back to London."

"But why didn't you tell that at the trial?"

"I had treated my father badly enough already. If I had made that explanation his name would have been dragged into the affair, and he would have died of shame. I thought at that time that I would rather suffer anything than give him this fresh trouble; but I confess that I never thought that I should be convicted, being innocent. But even if I had known what was the alternative of my silence, I think, and hope, that I should still have held my tongue. The poor old fellow would have died of a broken heart at the shame."

"Then didn't he know you were being tried?"

"Oh, he did not know that the notorious Forster was his son. He never knew that I had changed my name, because after I left home I ceased all communication with him."

"But when you wrote for the cheque?"

"I wrote as Wilson, and endorsed it as Wilson. The bookseller who cashed it thought it was a cheque that had been given me by a party of that name who had endorsed it for me."

"Your explanation is quite satisfactory," said Agatha. "That was all I wanted to know. And now tell me. You say your father now knows the position you are in. How did that come about?"

"You have read the story in the *Informers* of the extraordinary coincidence by which, just as I was dying of starvation in the little boat in which I had escaped from Nouméa, I was picked up on Lord Brookshire's yacht. That was my father, and it was there that I was forced to tell him all that happened since we had parted."

"He must have been terribly shocked."

"Aye, I thought he would go out of his mind. The old chap loves me dearly, and had been pining for me ever since I left him. Then to find me, and to learn that I was a convicted murderer and had escaped from a convict establishment, it was enough, was it not, to drive him crazy?"

"Yes; it was dreadful. But stop, there is another thing that I want to ask you. When you first came as Mr. Wilson to my house in London I was very suspicious about you in consequence of your conduct each time you were wakened. You know how you cried, and the queer things you said——"

"And still say, whenever I am suddenly wakened," interrupted Forster.

"Well," continued Agatha, "that struck me as peculiar, and I thought at one time that it was a proof that you had something on your conscience."

"It is natural enough," said Forster, bitterly. "Think of the waking I had that morning in the Roquette prison. I had been dreaming of home and of my mother, who is dead, when suddenly a hand is laid on my shoulder. I am shaken, and, starting up, see the room filled with men with sinister faces, and I am told that I have to die in the strength of my manhood—to die a hideous death for a crime which I had never committed. To die in a foreign land an ignominious death, in front of all the people, to die unknown without friends to cheer me, and to lie in a felon's grave far from home. That awakening was one to leave its impression on me, was it not? Since that terrible morning I always awake with the thought that the hideous scene is to be re-enacted round my bedside, and it is not until I have quite regained consciousness that I remember that my life at least is safe."

"Poor fellow," said Agatha, "I quite understand now; it must indeed have been a terrible awakening. You have suffered cruelly."

"Worse than any man who has not been through the same torture could believe. I will not speak of the guillotine, because I fainted almost directly after I was thrown on that plank, and all that happened afterwards was unknown to me. Besides, the sweet re-awakening to life, although in a prison cell, fully compensated for the horror of the moments near the machine of death. But the prison and the convoy, and the bagnio and the companionship of all those demons who were with me, no!" he cried, starting to his feet. "They shall never take me back there alive. I would rather die twenty deaths—the cruellest deaths, than return to Nouméa even for one day. What have I done? What have I done," he continued, walking about the room in great agitation, "to be tortured like this?"

"Hush," said Agatha. "Hush. You mustn't cry like that or you may waken my husband. Supposing he were to find us here. You know his temper and his absurd jealousy. How could I explain? Be assured that I feel for you most deeply. You have my promise," she cried, suddenly starting forward and taking the young man's hand, "I will never rest until I have brought the murderer of Pierre Lafargue to justice."

"And that you never shall!" said a voice at the door, which was suddenly thrown open.

CHAPTER XII.

A MIDNIGHT TRAGEDY.

WITH these words, Philip stepped into the room. In one hand he carried the bedroom candle, and in the other he held his revolver. He was in his night attire, and, with his black eyes staring out of his livid face, looked more like some terrible phantom than a human being. Agatha gave a little cry of surprise, which ended in a scream of terror when she had caught sight of her husband's face, and the intention unmistakably written in those staring eyes.

"He is mad! I am sure he is mad!" she whispered to Forster, as she clung to his arm. "Look at those eyes?"

"Don't be frightened, Agatha," whispered Forster, in reply, "I will see that he does not harm you." As he spoke these words he put himself between the woman and the man.

Meanwhile, Philip had advanced into the middle of the room, and once there had placed the candlestick on the table. He then repeated, speaking very calmly and deliberately—a tone which contrasted strangely with his appearance, which was that of a madman—"And that you never shall. And that you never shall."

"But, Philip! Philip!" cried Agatha, "what does this mean? You look so strange, and you have that terrible weapon in your hand. You have frightened me to death."

"I intend taking a shorter way of punishing you for

what you have done," he said, quietly, raising the pistol in his hand.

"Oh, my God!" cried Agatha. "But, Philip, Philip, what have I done? What have I done?"

"She asks what she has done," repeated Philip, turning with a smile towards Forster. "She has betrayed her husband—her own husband—to the hangman; and, having committed this most abominable treachery, she quietly asks me what she has done, just as I might ask you if you will smoke a pipe or whether you would prefer a cigar."

"Oh! there's no doubt of it now," whispered Agatha, in an agony of terror. "He is mad—mad!"

"I will tell you, sir," continued Philip, "what she has done, and what I mean to kill her for. She took advantage of my being asleep yesterday to steal certain papers out of a drawer in my room, and has used them for the purposes of betraying me to the police. The police were here this night, I know it. You are one of them, doubtless, sir. It is you, perhaps, who have received my wife's deposition. I can quite understand that she should hate me and want to get rid of me, for, of course, an invalid husband is a sad charge on a young woman, and I could pardon her for that; but what I cannot pardon is the treachery of her conduct—to betray me in that way, making me, as it were, betray myself. That is unpardonable and must be punished."

"But, Philip, you are dreaming," cried Agatha, somewhat reassured at the quiet way in which the man spoke, and at his making definite and refutable charges against her, pushing forward from behind Forster's back. "Those papers that I took out of your drawer yesterday, I thought they were a story that you had written, and I thought it would give you very great pleasure if I could get it printed for you, and you could get some money for your first effort.

I do not know what you mean by talking about my having betrayed you. The policemen who were here to-night came after this man, who is a persecuted fellow—the lodger who was with us at Norwood.”

“And with whom I find my wife keeping a midnight assignation. Better and better, treachery on every side. I suppose you know,” he continued, “what is my right now that I have found you two together. Yes? Exactly, and that is what I am going to do. Her, because she has betrayed me, and you, sir, because you will have seen me kill her.”

Then, without another word of warning, he raised his pistol and fired deliberately at his wife who was standing at a distance of about eight feet from him. Quick, however, as his action had been, that of Forster who had seen him raise the pistol was quicker, and even as Philip fired he pushed Agatha violently on one side so that the aim was missed; the ball crashed into the looking-glass that was on the wall behind where Agatha had been standing, splintering it into smithereens.

“No matter,” cried Philip, taking fresh aim; “I have five more shots.”

Agatha, screaming with terror, flung herself down on her knees with her hands upraised as though to implore for mercy. Forster, however, seeing that the man was again aiming and as deliberately as the last time, rushed forward to grapple with the madman. Philip saw him coming and quietly turning the aim of his pistol in his direction, fired at him. Forster gave a cry of pain and staggered against the wall. The bullet had entered his right arm tearing away the flesh and causing his blood to pour out in a thick red stream.

Philip now turned towards Agatha, who having now

risen to her feet was running wildly about the room screaming for help, and once more aimed at her. But this time Forster again interfered, and crying out: "You shall not hurt Agatha. You shall not kill Agatha!" pushed himself in front of her, though reeling with faintness from the loss of blood. This caused Philip to miss his aim once more.

"It is no use, sir," he said very quietly, "trying to prevent me from doing the work that is for my hands to do. That woman has to be punished for her treachery, and it is I who will punish her. You have already had a taste, and the best thing that I can see for you to do is to keep quiet until such time as I have finished with the lady. I shall then have full pleasure to attend to you."

Whilst he was speaking, Forster, who for some moments past had been reeling backwards and forwards with weakness and exhaustion, threw up his hands and crying, "Oh, Agatha, I can't protect you any longer. Oh! Oh!" fell, face forward, to the ground, where he lay in a spreading pool of blood.

Philip laughed and addressing Agatha who was standing against the wall staring at him like a mad woman, he said:

A nous deux, Madame, maintenant. So you thought," he continued, raising his pistol for the fourth time, "that it would pass off quietly like that. Give old Phil up to the police, eh? and get him hanged, eh? for what he did. And all that because Phil, being a soft-hearted chap, had written down a confession of a youthful indiscretion that he had committed some years ago."

"I swear by all that I have most holy," repeated Agatha, trying to reason with him, a supreme effort, "that what I have told you is the plain truth, and that when I touched those papers of yours I had not an idea of what their con-

tents were. I haven't read them, but sent them off to London. Oh."

Whilst she was speaking Philip had fired his fourth shot, but purposely without aim this time.

"Just to give you a start," he said, laughing in a mad way. "There are now two shots left, one for you and the other for me."

"But Phil, dear Phil," pleaded Agatha, "do be reasonable before any real harm is done. Do not let your mad jealousies carry you away and your morbid fears. There is not a vestige of foundation in anything you have accused me of, I assure you again and again. Put away that pistol and go away to bed quietly, and nobody shall be any the wiser. It is for your sake as much as mine that I implore you, Phil. Think that we might still be very happy together."

"It is too late," answered he. "Now that you know what you know there can be no more confidence between us. You will always hold it over my head."

"Hold what?" cried Agatha, still trying to reason him back into his senses, and holding up her hand as if to ward off the bullet in a way which was pitiful, in its utter helplessness, to behold.

"I am not going to waste any more words on you, you cursed ——," cried her husband, raising his pistol again, while his face, with its blood-shot eyes, now resembled that of a raving lunatic. "You know as well as I do what I did. You know that you are married to a man whose hands are stained in blood. You knew it all along. You must have suspected it time and time again. God! I betrayed myself twenty times a day. You know as well as I do that it was I—I—I, Philip Ouseley, your husband, who killed Pierre Lafargue."

Agatha had closed her eyes in terror when she saw that all chance of pacifying her husband had gone, and leaning against the wall was waiting for death. When, however, she heard the extraordinary confession that he made she gave a cry of surprise, and opened her eyes. She then saw the pistol pointing at her, and again screamed.

At that moment, and before the madman had had time to pull the trigger, the sound of feet was heard in the passage, the door was violently thrown open, and in rushed Inspector Williams at the head of his men, crying: "I knew that the rascal hadn't gone off. There he is, boys, seize him!"

But before the men could lay hands on him, Philip, with a curse, had darted out of the room and up the stairs into his bedroom, the door of which he flung to and locked on the inside. Just as the two men had come up to it, and were preparing to break it down, a loud report was heard, and then a cry and a fall.

"I say, inspector," cried Jack, bending over the balustrade, "he's been and gone and done it. He's shot himself."

"Serve him right," cried Inspector Williams. "Leave him alone for the present, and come down here to lend a hand with the lady and the gentleman what's wounded. Hillo!" he continued, "blowed if the victim isn't Master Joker himself, the chap what we was after. T'other, then," he said, as his men entered the room, "was the master of the house. May I lose my stripes if I can understand this here tragedy."

"Meanwhile," said the man Tom, "the lady wants looking to."

"No, no; do not trouble about me," said Agatha, who was sitting on the sofa, half-crazed; "but see to that poor fellow on the floor. He saved my life this night."

The inspector gave a glance at his two subordinates. He thought that he understood the tragedy now.

"You had better run at once to Doctor Carey's, at The Grange, Jack," said the inspector. "Tell him what has happened, and ask him to bring along his implements and so forth. Look sharp about it. We here will see after the gentleman and the lady."

About twenty minutes later Doctor Carey drove up in his trap, for by a piece of good fortune the constable had met him just as he was returning from a midnight visit to a patient in the town, and had been able to bring him on at once. He was greatly distressed to hear what had happened, and could not understand the first words of the story that the constable had been telling him *en route*.

At Agatha's request, his first care was for Forster, whose arm had been bandaged up skilfully enough by the inspector. Having removed the bandages and examined the wound, he pronounced it one of little gravity in itself, but which, in consequence of the loss of blood it had occasioned, might have troublesome consequences. He bandaged the arm up properly and set about administering restoratives, for up to then Forster had not recovered consciousness. Agatha bent over the doctor as he chafed the forehead, and passed strong salts under the nose. It was so long a time before these and other more urgent remedies took any effect, that the doctor was beginning to become seriously alarmed, when suddenly Forster opened his eyes. As consciousness came back to him, his face, already contracted with pain, grew distorted, and it was as if a combat was going on in his mind what to cry out. At last he cried: "Is Agatha safe! Is Agatha safe!" Agatha flushed up on hearing this, and a very tender feeling then came into her heart for the man. Her danger had made him forget

A MIDNIGHT TRAGEDY.

all he had undergone, even the terrible old shock had been effaced from his memory by the anguish of his anxiety for her. She was so touched at this fresh proof of his devotion that, but for the doctor's presence, she would have bent down and kissed him.

It was now time that something should be done to ascertain what had become of Philip, and, headed by the doctor, the men went upstairs, after Forster had been comfortably laid out on the sofa in the drawing-room. Agatha followed behind.

After repeated knocks, the door was broken down and the men entered the room. It was as had been expected. Philip had shot himself in the head, and was lying over the bed with the blood still trickling from a hideous wound. The doctor examined him, and pronounced that life was extinct. Philip Ouseley was dead.

"There is nothing more to be done," said Doctor Carey, shaking his head sadly. "Your poor husband has succeeded in his work and is dead." So saying he put out his hand to Agatha as if to console her.

"I see that," she said. "He was out of his mind when he did it. I will tell you all that has happened, Doctor, as soon as we have time to speak. It is a strange and a terrible story."

The body of Philip was then laid out on the bed, and leaving one of the constables to watch by the bedside the men descended, accompanied by Agatha.

Once down there, Doctor Carey suggested that it would perhaps be best for Agatha to come and spend the remainder of the night at his house, where his wife would be glad to accommodate her.

"I cannot leave Forster," she said pointing to the wounded man on the sofa.

The doctor looked at her rather sharply, for the contrast between her indifference at the terrible death of her husband, and her solicitude about this stranger, struck him as suspicious. He began to form his own opinion about the real reason for that night's tragedy. However, he was a large-hearted man, and would not judge and condemn on suspicion only. So he repeated, "Yes, come to my house. As for this gentleman, we will take him with us. I must have him under my care this night, as, in his case of weakness, were another bleeding to come on it might prove fatal. As it is, he will pass long years before he will recover his strength. I never saw a more emaciated body, and even before this wound he had too little blood. Think what it must be, now that he has lost about a quart."

"One minute before you go," said the inspector, taking out his pocket book; "but there is one thing that I want to ask you. I have got all the rest down for my report. But as we were coming in we heard one of the parties cry out: 'I am the murderer of Pierre Lafargue,' or something of that description. It would be very interesting for the purposes of justice to know who it was made that confession."

"It was the man upstairs," said Agatha. "It was doubtless some raving on his part."

"Doubtless," said Inspector Williams; "but it is interesting, because at the police-station in town we have had a notice from Scotland Yard, referring to an escaped convict, who was convicted for that very murder in Paris, and who is supposed to be in this island. He is wanted on an extradition warrant, and we have had special instructions to look out for him. It will be a capital thing for me to get on the inside of this affair."

"Well, that's all I know about it," said Agatha.

Shortly afterwards, Forster was removed to the doctor's house in the trap, while Agatha and the doctor followed on foot.

On the way, Agatha began relating the whole of the circumstances to the good old doctor, who was so interested that when they had reached the house and had put Forster to bed in the surgery, he begged her to continue her story.

When she had finished, and had asked him for his advice, the doctor said that the very best thing for Forster to do would be to give himself up to the police at once.

"Figuratively speaking, of course," said the doctor, "because he can't be moved. But let him send a message to the authorities, confessing himself to be the Forster that is wanted. I will keep him here, on the pretext that he is too ill to be removed, as long as possible, and in the meanwhile you will have had time to clear him of this horrible charge against him."

Agatha determined on following this advice, and the very next morning a servant was despatched to St. Peter's Port to inform the authorities that Forster, the notorious criminal, was lying dangerously wounded at the doctor's house. An inspector was immediately sent off, and was easily convinced that it was quite out of the question that Forster should be removed. Dr. Carey was a well-known and most highly-respected man, and the police were quite willing to accept his pledge that the prisoner should be produced at the earliest possible opportunity.

The same messenger who took the letter to the police also carried a long telegram to the telegraph office. It was addressed, "*Informer*, New York," and contained a full account, of over seven thousand words, of the tragedy of the previous evening. Agatha had not forgotten Mr. Mundy. However, in accordance with Forster's wishes, she

suppressed all allusion to his identity with Wilson, or the Earl of Brookshire. She felt that this was a great loss to the interest of the story as a news-item; but Forster's wishes were now sacred to her.

CHAPTER XII.

PHILIP'S CONFESSION.

ON the evening of the second day after the death of Philip, Agatha received through the post, a package marked as having been returned through the Dead Letter Office. It was the parcel of MSS. she had sent to Paternoster Row, and on the back of it was written by the postman, "Gone away without address." It was evident that Mr. Surbiton had only taken the attic in the Row for the purposes of the comedy he had played, and had doubtless now left it, forgetting that he had asked Agatha for another MS. However, as it happened, Agatha was very pleased to get this manuscript back, a novel sensation for her. With feverish hands she tore it open, and taking out her husband's manuscript, began at once to read it.

It was headed "MY CONFESSION," and ran as follows:—
"Knowing that I must soon die, for I have no trust in the improvement in my health that I have felt since I have been in this island, I am writing this confession of an abominable thing that I did, so that the unhappy man who is even now suffering innocently for a crime which he never committed, may at last be released. It is also in the hope that this document may lead to the arrest and punishment of the fiend in human shape who led me on to do what I have all my life so bitterly regretted that I write.

"My confession is this:—In conjunction with a scoundrel named Weissman, I murdered, to rob him, an old usurer

named Pierre Lafargue, in the Rue de la Harpe, in Paris, on the night of January 13th, 1880.

“This crime is known as the ‘Affair of the Rue de la Harpe,’ and was one of the *causes célèbres* of Paris. Everybody who reads the papers will remember that for this crime, an English youth named Forster was tried and convicted on really very strong circumstantial evidence. I feel that if I had been a jurymen, I should most certainly have convicted him upon the evidence that was brought against him. When I read the trial, I was at first delighted, and felt as if a terrific load had been lifted off my breast. When I heard that he was condemned to death, I exulted. I was particularly cheerful that night I remember, and I said that crime will out, and the sun will bring all things to the light.

“When, however, I read about the extraordinary occurrence at the execution of this innocent man it seemed to me that Providence had interfered in his behalf, and a terrible anxiety came over me. It was then not to end as I had hoped, nor was the crime of the Rue de la Harpe to be washed out in Forster’s blood. From that day forth I have known neither rest nor happiness. It seemed to me that the horrible oppression of the chest that I suffer from was not, as the doctors thought, an illness, but that it was the weight of my crime. Often of nights when I have waked suffocating and all bathed in cold perspiration, I have thought that the thing on my chest was the old man whom we killed. I cannot say that I felt any pity for Forster in prison; I think that whenever I thought of him it was rather with envy that he was innocent whilst I was guilty. He at least did not suffer as I did. But the remorse of my crime was with me at all times, and the terrible fear lest some day I should be found out and taken back to Paris to undergo what Forster

had so miraculously escaped. This thought and this fear were with me always. It is they that made me the savage brutal wretch that I was, and it is because of them that Agatha, my wife, has had to suffer as she has suffered at my hands. I think, however, that when I have written this confession I shall feel easier. When it is done I shall take it out into the garden one day and bury it somewhere. Then on my death-bed I will tell Agatha to look in such and such a place for a document, and then the truth will be known. For, though I do not feel any pity for Forster, now I think that after my death he may as well be freed, and besides, as I say, I want the scoundrel who has been the cause of my wickedness, and the misery that has resulted to me from it, to be caught and punished according to his deserts.

“In the year 1878 I went over to Paris to fill a place in the office of a shipbroker, in the Rue du Quatre Septembre. The place was very poorly remunerated. I think that all I earned was six pounds a month. I used to make a little also by giving English lessons; but I am sure that altogether my income rarely exceeded eight pounds a month. This means wretchedness in Paris for those who are forced to wear a black coat, and I had to suffer a great deal. However, by means of very great economy, I managed to get along fairly well without debt. I had, however, not been in Paris very long before a fellow clerk of mine asked me one Sunday to accompany him out to the races at Longchamps. I went with him, and whilst there he told me that he was able to make quite a good income out of betting on the races. That very day I saw him receive over eight hundred francs from a bookmaker with whom he had laid money on a horse. He told me that some days he made as much as a thousand francs. This

explained to me the great style in which he was able to live, in spite of the fact that he had no private means and that he was not very much better paid than I was. It was on that fatal day that my destruction began. I, too, was taken with the fever of betting. I, too, wanted to use this easy way of earning money, so as to be able to enjoy the good things of this life with which Paris teems.

"I had no good luck, however, and invariably lost. My very first Sunday was so disastrous that I was forced to live on dry bread and water for over a fortnight before I had recouped my losses. Nor had I any better fortune on any of the succeeding days on which I tried to play. In the meanwhile I had made—at the little restaurant that I frequented in the Latin Quarter—the acquaintance of a German individual named Weissman, who had been introduced to me as a Socialist of great authority. It was he who, when I had told him of my futile endeavours to improve my position by gambling, told me that the better way by far was to play at cards. He introduced me to a small café in the Rue St. Jacques, where a few foolish young freshmen used to come and play baccarat, and which he frequented for the same purpose. He taught me how to play, and assisted me at the table. Strange to say that I nearly always won. Weissman used to make me give him half of all my winnings, but there still remained for me enough money to enable me to enjoy myself as much as I wanted to, beast as I was at that time. I won't confess all that I have on my mind with reference to that gambling-place because I am not quite sure of what I suspected—as I was a constant winner I did not care to investigate matters too closely—and besides the confession of the great crime renders it unnecessary to confess my many minor peccadillos,

"As time went by I began to get more and more under the influence of Weissman, whom I grew to consider a great philosopher and a most remarkable man. He was a Socialist of the school of Bakounine, and his favourite doctrine was that the middle classes being composed of thieves, it was the right, nay the duty, of the proletariat to rob them whenever the chance presented itself. He did not call that robbery, he called it restitution. He said that the garotter was far more to be respected than the adulterating grocer, because the former risked his life, while the latter drove his cowardly fraud in perfect security. He used to say that the same jury-men who would condemn a working man to prison for stealing the loaf that was to save his family from starvation, would not hesitate to pass off a base franc piece on a cabman or a customer. At first I revolted against these theories, but his arguments were so clever, and he so insisted on his theory, that little by little as the ascendancy of the vile wretch grew stronger and stronger over me I began to accept them as truth. Still, I remember that the first time that I saw him put his theory into practice, I felt inclined to tell him that I would speak to him no more. It was one night on the Boulevard St. Michel. We were passing by a grocer's shop together, and it happened that the youth who usually stood in inspection over the goods displayed outside the shop was absent. As we passed by, Weissman caught up a box of sardines and put them into his pocket. I was very indignant and remonstrated with him, but he said that that grocer was a regular scoundrel, and was reputed for selling the worst adulterated wine in the quarter. After that I was the frequent witness of his larcenies, and, as I say, little by little I grew to approve of his system and to condone it. After some time I found myself thinking that society owed

me restitution as much as it did to my companion. It was about this time that the café ceased to be productive. I fancy the students had suspected that all was not fair in our play, and had taken their cards and their spare cash elsewhere. Just at that time also, I was greatly in debt. It was not very surprising then, that prepared as I was, I should begin stealing money at the office. This was all the easier for me to accomplish, as in our office the old-fashioned French system of checking accounts only once a quarter was in force. We were all implicitly trusted in by our employers. It was only the first time that I stole that I felt any remorse. That step taken, all went very easily. I used to dip into my cash-drawer just as if the money had been my own property. One day I would take twenty francs, another day a hundred franc note. Once I remember that I took four hundred francs. My luck just then, both at cards and at the races, was deplorable, and I lost everything that I stole. Of course I counted absolutely on winning back enough before quarter-day to replace my thefts. But as time went on, and the 15th of January of the next year drew nearer and nearer, I began to feel terribly ill at ease. The theories of Weissman, cogent as they seemed to me, would not, I thought, convince my masters; and, indeed, I felt as if I had not sufficiently grasped them to enable me to base a really satisfactory defence of my conduct upon them the day when I should be forced to explain the deficiencies in my accounts. It was about this time that Weissman began to entertain me with accounts of the villainy of a certain Pierre Lafargue, the old usurer of the Rue de la Harpe, whom he described to me as the very worst and vilest specimen of exploiting bourgeois that existed. I never met him but he com-

menced to speak about this person, and in terms so abusive that at last I also conceived a hatred and a spirit of revenge against the man. According to my companion, Lafargue had ruined hundreds of families, and had driven a number of young men to suicide. That scoundrel Weissman had such influence over me that, after having primed me for a considerable time, he was able one day to propose to me that we should rob the old man, without causing any revolt in my mind. Certainly, I did speak against such a plan with much energy, but he was very soon able to silence all my scruples. His plan was that we should rob the old man, not for our own enrichment, but, so that once having got his money into our hands, we could distribute it by way of restitution amongst the poor. As for his part, he said it was his intention to send it to the Anarchist fund in Chicago. I thought, *à propos* of that, that it seemed a very good and humane suggestion; but, at the same time, I reflected that there would be no need to distribute the money at once, and that I should be fully authorised to borrow from the fund thus put at my disposal sufficient to replace what I had stolen. I think it was chiefly the fear that I had of discovery and disgrace, and less a wish to benefit humanity and to do justice, that prompted me to accept the proposal of my companion. He was very pleased at my readiness to help him, and at once began fixing a date for the execution of our design. He was for undertaking the expedition on the 20th of January; for it appeared that, for some reason of his own, Lafargue used to collect his debts on that day of the month. I, however, insisted that it should be done on the 12th, or 13th at the latest, as it was on the 15th that my accounts were to be examined by our head cashier. My deficiency amounted at that time to

about one hundred pounds. However, from what I heard from Weissman, it was certain that my half of the booty would amount to very much more than that sum. Finally, it was decided that we should visit Lafargue on the 13th. Weissman, it appeared, was so well acquainted with him that it would seem quite natural to the old man to receive a visit from him at a late hour in the night, and this being so we decided that it would be safest for us to call on the old man between midnight and two o'clock. Our plan was, that I should be introduced by Weissman as a young student wanting a loan, and that while the old usurer was bargaining with me Weissman should occupy himself with the bureau in which, as he knew, the old man kept his valuables. As soon as the robbery was committed, we were to find some pretext for going away. Weissman said that we ran absolutely no risk, because the old man would never dare to report the robber to the police. His business was not one for him to care to have the police meddling with his affairs, so that we were absolutely safe.

"We took rendezvous for the Café du Bas-Rhin, and duly met there on the night of the 13th, at eleven o'clock. I may say that at the last I was absolutely against the scheme, and tried hard to persuade Weissman to give up the plan. But he laughed at my fears, and excited my cupidity by telling me that he was certain that my share in the plunder would exceed six or seven hundred pounds.

"It was some time after midnight when we left the café, having well rehearsed our rôles, and it must have been about a quarter past one when we knocked at the door of the Rue de la Harpe Hotel, as we had delayed a while en route, and had also spent a short time in the street looking up at the old man's windows, which were lighted up and discussing whether there was any chance of our being seen

from the opposite houses while engaged in what we had come to do.

“It had been arranged by Weissman that, as he was known to the porter of the hotel and as I was not, I alone should be seen passing the window in the porter’s lodge and should cry out where I was going to. Weissman crawled after me on all fours, and it was not until we had reached the staircase and were out of sight of the porter that he rose to his feet again. It was only on the stairs that a suspicion of what were the resolutions of this abominable scoundrel, in the case of resistance on the part of the old man, entered my mind, for as we reached the third landing he caught hold of my hand and whispered in my ear, “Trust in me, whatever happens.” I remember that I was trembling violently at the time, but that when he spoke to me like that I grew quite cold and asked, in a voice which it makes me shudder to-day to think of, what he meant, seeing that all that could possibly happen had been discussed by us. He made no answer, and as at that minute a door on the landing below opened, I could do nothing but follow him. The next moment he was knocking at the usurer’s door, and almost directly afterwards we were admitted.

“It seems that when we called, Pierre Lafargue had been examining a quantity of jewels of his. When he heard us knock, he threw a cloth over the table on which they were lying. I noticed this table the very first thing as I entered the room. He gave a very friendly greeting to Weissman, and thanked him for introducing a fresh client. The old man was in very high spirits that night, and when Weissman asked him what was the reason of his joy, he said that he had had a very unusual experience that night, that a young Englishman to whom he had

lent ten francs without exacting any pledge—a sum of money which he had considered as good as lost—had just been there to repay him. He held up the ten-franc piece and chuckled. ‘After all,’ he said, ‘there are some honest people in the world.’

“‘That’s lucky for you and me,’ answered Weissman, with a laugh, ‘as we live upon them.’

“The old usurer grinned, and then began to ask me for particulars about the loan that I wanted.

“I relate the above incident, because I saw that at his trial, Forster stated that the object of his visit to Lafargue on the night of the murder (he must have preceded us by only a few minutes) had been to repay a small loan that he had had from the old man. This will show that in this point also his testimony was perfectly correct.

“I had my story ready, and began detailing it. I suppose that the old man had full confidence in Weissman, because, instead of keeping his eyes on him whilst we were speaking, he sat down with his back to the bureau, near which Weissman had placed himself on the pretext of looking out of the window, and kept his eyes whilst he listened to me on the table, which was covered over with a cloth. I played my part very well, and told all the lies I had prepared with great assurance. I felt horribly nervous all the time, knowing what was going on behind me. Weissman kept whistling, and tapping his finger against the window, as though he were still looking out into the street. I have often wondered how he managed to do it, since he was forcing the bureau drawer at the time. At one time it seemed to me that Lafargue thought that I was humbugging him, for he began to cross-examine me vigorously. I was, however, a match for him, and must have satisfied him, for at the end he

said that if all that I had said was true he would have no objection whatever to make me the very large advance that I had asked. He had arranged that I should ask for a large sum so that the old man's attention might be all the more taken up. Just as he had said:—'Well then, we will talk this over to-morrow when you have shown me your papers'—we heard a cracking noise behind us, and turning round, saw Weissman standing over the bureau drawer with a large portfolio and a bag in his hand. No sooner had he seen this than old Lafargue threw up his hands and was just rushing forward to seize the robber and to scream for help, when Weissman, to my horror, brought out of his breast a long and formidable butcher's knife, and catching Lafargue by the throat plunged it into his breast. The wound was not a fatal one, for the old man struggled violently. Weissman clung to his throat, and again and again stabbed and stabbed. I was petrified with horror, and, for a while, could move neither hand nor foot. The ghastly struggle seemed to last for long hours. Doubtless, it was all over in a minute. I have no definite recollection of what next ensued. It seems to me that suddenly waking from my stupor, and as if intoxicated at the sight of so much blood, and feeling that I ought to stand by my accomplice in his work, I too rushed forward and stabbed the man with the knife that in the last struggle had fallen from Weissman's hands; that I saw the old man fall forward dead to the ground, and that then I rushed from the room. I only remember definitely that some time after I found myself on the St. Michel's bridge with the knife in my hand, and a number of jewels between my fingers. How I got these I do not know. Did I, as I rushed from the room, snatch at the glittering mass on the table? All I know is that when I came to

myself again on that bridge, a fearful horror of what I had done came over me, and that, flinging the knife and the jewels into the river, I rushed home like a madman. It was, doubtless, then that the brooch, which was afterwards found by Forster, fell into the gutter. It was only as I threw myself on my bed, that it struck me that Weissman had deserted me. It was not till next day though, that I saw clearly how completely I had been made that man's dupe. He never came to the rendezvous we had appointed, and I never saw him again. He had made off with the plunder and had left me to run the risk of detection for what was really his crime.

"I will not attempt to describe the agony of that day, with the remembrance of my useless crime upon me, and the prospect of my detection as an embezzler on the morrow before me. By a strange coincidence, a piece of irony of fortune, on the morning of the 15th, I received from a solicitor in London, a cheque for two hundred pounds, as my share in the residue of an estate to which I was a legatee. This enabled me to replace the funds that were missing in my cash-box and to pass the inspection of accounts. As soon after as it was safe to do so, I resigned my place, and came over to London, where I found similar employment. Some time after that I married. I may say that I have never had an hour's happiness since that day.

"This I declare, is a confession truthful in every respect.

(Signed) "PHILIP OUSELEY.

"GUERNSEY,

"May, 1888."

A day or two later this document was read aloud at the inquest over Philip's body, and, at the same time, the evidence of the constables was taken; for, although this had nothing to do with the cause of the death, it was

thought right, for Forster's sake, that the whole matter should be as fully investigated as possible at the time. The verdict was one of *felo de se*, and the jury added that they were satisfied that the reason why the deceased had committed suicide was that he believed that his confession of the murder of Lafargue had been taken for the purpose of betraying him. Forster's gallant conduct was most flatteringly commented upon, and it was generally considered, not only in Guernsey alone, but all over the world, that he would have no difficulty in clearing himself of the charge for which he had been convicted.

It was, however, necessary for him to place himself in the hands of the French authorities, and as soon as ever he was well enough to do so, he presented himself at the central police station in St. Peter's Port, where he was arrested on an extradition warrant by a representative of the French police. After having been brought up before the magistrates, where his identity as the escaped convict was established, he was escorted on board the packet to Granville, and in due course brought back to Paris. Agatha accompanied him. It may be mentioned that he was treated very considerately by the policemen who had charge of him, and that he was allowed to communicate as freely as he chose with his lady friend. Not a word about his real identity had transpired at the inquest. Almost immediately after his arrival in Paris, Maître Guerin applied to the Court of Appeal for a fresh trial of the prisoner Forster, and on the evidence produced was granted his request. Money was freely spent to bring together all the evidence that could be procured, both as to the truth of Philip's statements and the identity of Weissman. It was proved that the confession was correct in almost every particular. The defalcations committed by him could be established.

It was found that he was remembered as a card-sharper in the Quartier Latin, where Weissman was also very well remembered. Curiously enough, amongst the papers relating to this affair, which were stored up at the Prefecture, there was discovered an anonymous denunciation, which now that the facts were known clearly, indicated that certain persons had always suspected Weissman of being connected with this affair. The house where Weissman had lived in Paris was found—it was the one where Agatha had got her information about the man whose name had been forgotten—and in the examination of the landlord, things came out which caused the Procureur to order his arrest. It appeared namely, that on the morrow of the murder, this man, whose reputation was none of the best, had purchased from his lodger a couple of diamond rings, which were recognised on examination to have been part of the property stolen from Lafargue. When the news of the murder got about, the landlord grew frightened and hid the jewels away. After Forster's condemnation he disposed of them to a jeweller in the Rue Montmartre, who hearing the news of the trial of revision, communicated with the police.

The cheque that Ouseley had received on the morning of the 15th was traced, and this part of the confession proved to be true.

Altogether, nobody in Paris was surprised when in the end the jury decided that there was reason that the sentence pronounced against Forster by the Paris Court of Assize should be quashed, and his rehabilitation proceeded with at once."

The process of rehabilitation took some time, for the formalities that had to be gone through were numerous; but the day arrived at last when he was brought into the

Court of Appeal where, before the largest and most fashionable audience that had ever been gathered together in that court, the red-robed Councillor read out to him that the sentence upon him had been found an unjust one, and that it was quashed. "The Court finds you a free and an honourable man, and bids you go your way in peace and in the respect of your fellows."

Forster left the Court with Agatha, and immediately afterwards crossed for London, travelling alone.

To the despair of the reporters and the curious of every description he was, and remained, unfindable from the day he arrived in London. Some people noticed, it is true, that his disappearance coincided with the absence from town of Lord Brookshire, who was reported to be yachting in the Mediterranean.

EPILOGUE.

In the autumn of last year two visitors presented themselves one morning at the office of the *New York Informer*, and asked to see the editor. The elevator boy did not encourage them in the hope that Mr. Mundy would receive them, until one of them, a very pretty young woman, told him to tell Mr. Mundy that it was Agatha that wanted to see him.

As soon as he heard this name, he cried out : " Oh ! then there's no need of my announcing you. You've got to go straight upstairs."

A minute or two later, Mr. Mundy, who was sitting in the editorial sanctum, heard a knock at his door, and saw Agatha enter, followed by a tall, thin, young man, who looked very ill, and who seemed to cling to the skirt of the young woman like a child does to the dress of its mother.

"Agatha Ouseley!" cried the editor, coming forward with his hand outstretched; "but I thought you wrote me you had married Forster, that is to say, Wilson, or Lord What-is-it."

"This is Forster," said Agatha, presenting her husband.

"The poor fellow, the poor fellow," said Mundy. "Well, to think what they have made of him. I say, Forster, you can't feel as grateful to me now as you did at the time for my sending you off to Paris on that art and letters assignment, eh?"

"I don't know," said Forster, putting out his hand to his wife, "I often feel that all I have undergone has been fully repaid to me by this—that it gave me Agatha. I am so happy now, that I forget all the rest."

"What we have come here for chiefly to-day," said Agatha, "is to thank you, Mr. Mundy, for your kindness in following our wishes, and in keeping silence over his paternity. It was a great sacrifice on your part, and I know how much we owe you for your discretion in this matter. My husband says that it would have killed his old father if this had got about, for though he is proved innocent the scandal is there all the same."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Mundy, almost irritably, "I can tell you that, when I got your letter asking me to drop that part of the story, I felt inclined to refuse. It was hard—now come, wasn't it hard—for me to give up such a splendid chapter in our story as that. But I reflected that he had suffered enough in the *Informers* service, and the word was passed to the editorial staff. And now," he continued, regaining his good humour, "I have a piece of news for you. An item has just come in by telegram, which looks as if we shall be able to present the final chapter of this romance in real life to the *Informers* public in the course of the next few days. This is the item I refer to."

So saying, the editor caught up a telegram that was lying amongst the papers on his desk and read out:—"Bismarck, Dakota.—News has just reached this city of the lynching in a wood near Moltkeville of a well-known tough and cardsharper called Weissman, who came to Dakota from Chicago some time ago. Fuller particulars follow." "That's it," he said. "Instructions were immediately cabled to the correspondent at Bismarck, ordering the very fullest particulars, as well as that a photograph of this Weissman should be obtained. It will all come along shortly, and in a day or two the *Informer* will come out with some reading matter and cuts which will please New York. And after that I suppose we can let the matter drop. It has been a good thing for us, I can tell you, and has done the paper a great deal of good. I am sorry," he continued, turning to Forster, "that you should have suffered so much, but I suppose you mean to make a good thing out of it. In the first place you can have as many columns as you like in the *Informer* for the next two months to write up your memoirs in, and to give us your experiences. Your copy shall be paid for at the rate of one hundred dollars a column. It would be a good start for a course of lectures throughout the States. There isn't a lectureman in New York city who wouldn't run you at your own price. Think of a lecture entitled, 'How I felt under the Knife of the Guillotine.' There is a fortune in it."

"No, we shall do nothing of the sort," said Agatha. Then lowering her voice she added, speaking to the editor:

"As you can see, the poor fellow needs absolute rest and quiet. I am going to take him south, to Florida, where his father has friends. I think that, with great care, we may be able to make a man of him again. When he is restored to

health, and not before, he will turn up as the missing heir and join his father in London. Not that he cares twopence about the position that he will thus obtain. All he wants is to live quietly with me. But his father has insisted on this. We are to let this Forster affair be forgotten, and to get his son well. When he is well he will be produced and recognised by Brookshire as his son."

"Some day, sir," said the editor, turning to his ex-reporter, "we shall see you as a bloated aristocrat."

"Not if I can help it," said Forster. Then, putting out his hand to his wife again, with his familiar gesture of affection and trust, he added: "All that I now want in life is to live in peace with Agatha. I do need rest and love; I do, indeed."

"Well" said the editor, as he resumed his seat at his table, whilst the couple moved towards the door. "Well, you both had difficult assignments to fill and you both filled them well. You both suffered, but you have both come out happy in the end. That is the reward of good and interesting work. Your example will be quoted to *Informer* reporters for years to come, and you will be looked up to as models in Press circles. You have made your mark in American journalism. And that, I can tell you, is, as the Press is to-day, constituted a far bigger honour than any memorial tablet in Westminster Abbey, or anything of that sort. Good morning, and good luck to you both!"

And he meant what he said.

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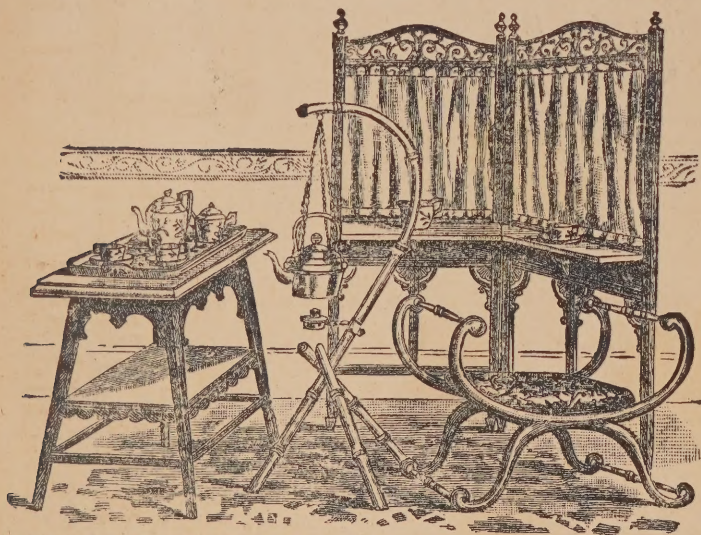
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